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THE LIFE OF FRANCIS THOMPSON

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THE LIFE OF FRANCIS THOMPSON

BY EVERARD MEYNELL

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[EVERARD MEYNELL, who died in December 1925, devoted his last weeks to a final revision of *The Life of Francis Thompson;* and this improved version now replaces the volume as first published in 1913.]

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THE LIFE OF FRANCIS THOMPSON

CHAPTER I

THE CHILD

"I WAS born in 1858 or 1859 (I never could remember and don't care which) at Preston in Lancashire. Residing there, my mother more than once pointed out to me, as we passed it, the house wherein I was born; and it seemed to me disappointingly like any other house."

The 16th of December 1859 was the day, 7 Winckley Street, a box of a house in a narrow road, the place of Francis Joseph Thompson's birth. He was the second son of Charles Thompson and his wife, Mary Turner Morton.[1] As a doctor, the poet's father first practised at Bristol, and after a term as house-surgeon in the Homeopathic Dispensary in Manchester, he married and set up a practice in Preston. Like his wife, his sisters, of whom two were nuns, and the majority of his brothers, Dr. Thompson was a convert to the Catholic Church; but, unlike his brothers, he never committed himself to authorship, and is remembered only in the many good opinions of those who knew him. For his patients he had something of the pastoral feeling; his rounds were his diocese, and in the statistics

[1] A pedigree of Thompson's family, compiled by Perceval Lucas, is printed in *The Pedigree Register* for March, 1913.

of kindness which no man keeps—in deference perhaps to the thoroughness of the Recording Angel—his name, it is conjectured, figures largely. Though he attended as many patients as the most successful members of his profession, his fees were smaller and fewer. He stood, like his clients of the poorer quarters, in fear of the Creator firstly, and of death secondly; and so it happened that, having ministered to mother and child, he would pour out the waters of baptism over infants who made as if to leave the world as soon as they had entered it. This much of his kindness will serve as a preface to the story of the part which, forced to a seeming severity, he played in the career of his son.

The verses of two of Charles Thompson's brothers (Francis's uncles[1]) supply no clue, not even a plebeian one, to the origin of Francis's muse. Edward Healy Thompson's sonnets and John Costall Thompson's *Vision of Liberty* show that not a dozen such rhyming uncles could endow a birth with poetry.

On the other hand, Miss Agnes Martin, a cousin of Francis, writes: "From his father he inherited his passion for religion, and, from what I know of his

[1] Edward Healy Thompson, sometime curate in the parish of Elia's "sweet Calne in Wiltshire," married Harriet Diana, daughter of Nicolson Calvert, M.P. for Hertford, by Frances, co-heir of the 1st and last Viscount Pery. Another uncle of the poet was the Rev. Henry Thompson, who was educated at Magdalen Hall, Oxford; took clerical duty at Kirk Hammerton and at Greatham (Hants); published a sermon (1850) entitled *The New Birth by Water and the Spirit;* married Julia, daughter of Sir William Yea, Bart. A daughter by this union, Charlotte Anne Hechstetter Yea Thompson, married (1869) Ralph Abercrombie Cameron, elder son of the Rev. Alexander Cameron by Charlotte, daughter of the Hon. Edward Rice, D.D., Dean of Gloucester. A fourth uncle of the poet, James Thompson, lost his life in South Africa.

poetry, I find he has expressed thoughts and yearnings habitual to other members of his father's family." It was Francis's own custom to speak of his mother as if it were from her at least as much as from his father that he derived certain mental and physical characteristics. Born in Manchester in 1822, she was daughter of Joseph Morton and Harriet Sigley. Her father, a clerk in the bank of Messrs. Jones, Lloyd and Co., was afterwards first manager of the newly-founded Manchester Assurance Co., and later suffered losses in a personal business enterprise. In 1851 her family left Manchester for Chelsea, and there in 1854 she was living with people who befriended her desire, frowned upon by her family, of becoming a Catholic. She became engaged to the son of the house, but he died, and before the close of the year she was received into the Church. In how far she was cast out by her own people I do not know, but to some degree she rehearsed the part to be played, after her death, in her own household by her own son. She set out to make a living, and took a position as governess at Sale, near Manchester, having failed—as he failed in his Ushaw days—in an attempt to enter the Religious Life.[1] In the following year, while still in the neighbourhood of Manchester, she met her future husband. She died December 19, 1880, at Stamford Street, Ashton-under-Lyne. Dr. Thompson married as his second wife Anne Richardson, in 1887.

From Winckley Street, associated with none of Francis's conscious experiences of existence, the family moved to Winckley Square and to Lathom Street,

[1] At the Convent of the Holy Child, St. Leonards-on-Sea.

Preston, and in 1864 to Ashton-under-Lyne, where they remained until Francis's flight to London twenty-one years later.

" Know you what it is to be a child ?" asks Thompson in his Essay on Shelley; the answer tells us what it was to be the child Francis:—

" It is to have a spirit yet streaming from the waters of baptism; it is to believe in love, to believe in loveliness, to believe in belief; it is to be so little that the elves can reach to whisper in your ear; it is to turn pumpkins into coaches, and mice into horses, lowness into loftiness, and nothing into everything, for each child has its fairy godmother in its own soul; it is to live in a nutshell and to count yourself the king of infinite space; it is

To see a world in a grain of sand,
And a heaven in a wild flower,
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand,
And eternity in an hour;

it is to know not as yet that you are under sentence of life, nor petition that it be commuted into death. When we become conscious in dreaming that we dream, the dream is on the point of breaking; when we become conscious in living that we live, the ill dream is but just beginning."

Francis was early alive. In a note-book he says: " Yes, childhood is tragic to me. And then critics complain that I do not write ' simply ' about it. O fools ! as if there was anything more complex, held closer to the heart of mystery, than its contemplation." He forgot perhaps that even fools have experienced the dereliction and despair which catches at all children at some time or another. It is improbable that he

suffered, but possible that he remembered, more than other children.

Having attended for two months the school of the Nuns of the Cross and the Passion—a name full of anticipations—he reached, in the cold phrase that admits to first Confession and Communion, the " age of discretion." At seven years he was reading poetry, and, overwhelmed by feelings of which he knew not the meaning, had found his way to the heart of Shakespeare and Coleridge: their three ages of discretion kept company. Already seeking the highway and the highway's seclusion, he would carry his book to the stairs, where, away from the constraint of chairs and tables and the unemotional flatness of the floor, his sister Mary remembers him. It is on that household highway, where the voices and noises of the house, and the footsteps of passengers on the pavement beyond the dark front door, come and pass quickly into other regions, that the child meditates and learns. There he may contract the habit of loneliness, populate his fancy with the creatures of fear, and gather about him a company of thoughts that will be his intimates until the end. And all the thronging personages of the boy's imagination are perhaps darkly arrayed against him. The crowd will be of tremors rather than of smiles, of secret rather than open-handed truths; the lessons learnt in that steep college of childhood are not joyful. The " long tragedy of early experiences " of which he spoke was a tragedy adventured upon alone. With his mother and his sisters,[1] their toys, his books, and

[1] Mary became a nun in Manchester, and Margaret (Richardson) a wife and mother in Canada.

his own inventions, he was happy. He would give entertainments to a more or less patient and tolerant audience of sisters; conjurer's tricks, and a model theatre on whose stage he would dangle marionettes, were the favourite performances, to one of which he was beholden for amusement and occupation till the end of his life. Yet it was thus early that he became, in his own words, " expert in concealment, not expression, of myself. Expression I reserved for my pen. My tongue was tenaciously disciplined in silence." In a note-book that he had by him towards the end of his life and in which there are many allusions to its beginnings, he wrote of the " world-wide desolation and terror of, for the first time, realising that the mother can lose you, or you her, and your own abysmal loneliness and helplessness without her." Such a feeling he compares to that of first fearing yourself to be without God.

His toys he never quite relinquished; among the few possessions at his death was a cardboard theatre, wonderfully contrived, seeing that his fingers never learnt the ordinary tricks of usefulness, and with this his play was very earnest, as is attested in a note-book query—" Sylvia's hairs shall work the figures (?)." That he was content with his childhood, its toys, and even its troubles, he has particularly asserted. " I did not want responsibility, did not want to be a man. Toys I could surrender, with chagrin, so I had my great toy of imagination whereby the world became to me my box of toys." And again:—

" There is a sense in which I have always been and even now remain a child. But in another sense I never was a

child, never shared children's thoughts, ways, tastes, manner of life, and outlook on life. I played, but my sport was solitary sport, even when I played with my sisters; from the time I began to read (about my sixth year) the game often (I think) meant one thing to me and another (quite another) to them—my side of the game was part of a dream-scheme invisible to them. And from boys, with their hard practical objectivity of play, I was tenfold wider apart than from girls with their partial capacity and habit of make-believe."

Crosses he also experienced, and the sense of injustice was awakened early. He lost the prize—a clockwork mouse, no less!—offered by his governess. Although first in lessons, his brisker, punctual-footed sisters and governess would have to wait many times during a walk for him to come up with them. And so the mouse went to a sister. "I remembered the prize," she writes, "but had forgotten the reason of my luck. But Francis *never* forgot it; he could never see the justice of it, he said—and no wonder!" His tremulous, sudden "not ready!" jerked out at the beginning of a game of cards, is still heard in the same sister's memory, and also the leverage of calls and knockings that was required to get him from the house for church or a train; and his unrecognising progress in the street. Every detail of the boy recalls the man to one who had to get him forth from his chamber when he was a grown traveller, and has often seen him oblivious in the streets, and has heard his imperative appeals for "ten minutes more" in all the small businesses of his later life. As a youth during the Russo-Turkish war he built a city of chairs with a plank for drawbridge; "Plevna," his father said, would be found written in his heart for the interest he had in the siege.

If Plevna was written there, then so was Ladysmith. He had no plank drawbridge during the Boer war, but he was none the less excited on that account.

Of dolls he writes, in "The Fourth Order of Humanity," that he was

"withheld even in childhood from the youthful male's contempt for these short-lived parasites of the nursery. I questioned, with wounded feelings, the straitened feminine intolerance which said to the boy: 'Thou shalt not hold a baby; thou shalt not possess a doll.' In the matter of babies, I was hopeless to shake the illiberal prejudice; in the matter of dolls, I essayed to confound it. By eloquence and fine diplomacy I wrung from my sisters a concession of dolls; whence I date my knowledge of the kind. But ineluctable sex declared itself. I dramatized them, I fell in love with them; I did not father them; intolerance was justified of her children. One in particular I selected, one with surpassing fairness crowned, and bowed before the fourteen inches of her skirt. She was beautiful. She was one of Shakespeare's heroines. She was an amity of inter-removed miracles; all wrangling excellences at pact in one sole doll; the frontiers of jealous virtues marched in her, yet trespassed not against her peace; and her gracious gift of silence I have not known in woman. I desired for her some worthy name; and asked of my mother: Who was the fairest among living women? Laughingly was I answered that I was a hard questioner, but that perhaps the Empress of the French bore the bell for beauty. Hence, accordingly, my Princess of puppetdom received her style; and at this hour, though she has long since vanished to some realm where all sawdust is wiped for ever from dolls' wounds, I cannot hear that name but the Past touches me with a rigid agglomeration of small china fingers."

A housemaid remembers Francis on the top of the ladder in the book-cupboard, oblivious of her call to meals. Of this early reading he writes:

He Reads Shakespeare

"I read certain poetry—Shakespeare, Scott, the two chief poems of Coleridge, the ballads of Macaulay—mainly for its dramatic or narrative power. No doubt—especially in the case of Shakespeare, and (to a less extent) Coleridge—I had a certain sublatent, subconscious, elementary sense of poetry as I read. But this was, for the more part, scarce explicit; and was largely confined to the atmosphere, the exhalation of the work. To give some concrete instance of what I mean. In the *Midsummer Night's Dream* I experienced profoundly that sense of trance, of dream-like dimness, the moonlight glimmer and sleep-walking enchantment, embodied in that wonderful fairy epilogue 'Now the cat' &c., and suggested by Shakespeare in the lines, 'These things seem small and undistinguishable, like far off mountains turned into clouds.' I did indeed, as I read the last words of Puck, feel as if I were waking from a dream and rub my mental eyes. No doubt the sense of the lines 'These things' &c., was quickened (it may be created—I will not at this distance say) by an excellent note on them in the edition I read. But the effect on me of the close was beyond and independent of all notes. So, in truth, was it with the play as a whole. So, again, I profoundly experienced the atmospheric effect of *Macbeth*, *Lear*, *The Tempest*, *Coriolanus*, of all the plays in various degree. Never again have I sensed so exquisitely, so virginally, the *aura* of the plays as I sensed it then. Less often I may have drunk the effluence of particular passages, as in the case already instanced. But never, in any individual passage, did I sense the poetry of the poetry, the poetry as poetry. To express it differently, I was over young to have awakened to the poetry of words, the beauty of language which is the true flower of poetry, the sense of magic in diction, of words suddenly becoming a marvel and quick with a preternatural life. It is the opening of the eyes to that wonder which signalises the puberty of poetry. I was, in fact, as a child, where most men remain all their lives. Nay, they are not so far, for my elemental perception, my dawn before sunrise, had a passion and prophetic intensity which they (with rare exceptions) lack. It was not stunted, it was only nascent."

Another recollection:—

"I understood love in Shakespeare and Scott, which I connected with the lovely, long-tressed women of F. C. Selous' illustrations to Cassell's Shakespeare, my childish introduction to the supreme poet.[1] Those girls of floating hair I loved; and admired the long-haired, beautiful youths whom I met in these pictures, and the illustrations of early English History. Shakespeare I had already tried to read for the benefit of my sisters and the servants; but both kicked against *Julius Cæsar* as dry—though they diplomatically refrained from saying so. Comparing the pictures of mediæval women with the crinolined and chignoned girls of my own day, I embraced the fatal but undoubting conviction that beauty expired somewhere about the time of Henry VIII. I believe I connected that awful catastrophe with the Reformation (merely because, from the pictures, and to my taste, they seemed to have taken place about the same time)."

He "first beheld the ocean" at Colwyn Bay when he was five years old. It was there that the Thompsons spent their holidays, several excursions there during a year keeping them in touch with the sea. Its sunsets are remembered by Mother Austin, his sister, in her convent in black Manchester, and as particularly attracting Francis, "the phosphorescence on the crest of the waves at dusk."

There Francis bathed, always with the consecrated medal that was still round his neck when he died. He would not strip it from its place, and his sister, only less pious, would laugh at his anxiety concerning it.

[1] A photograph (now missing), taken at the age of eleven or twelve, shows Francis with a small bust of Shakespeare—the treasured gift of his mother. In all the early photographs he conforms to one early description—"a boy known for his piety, obedience, and truthfulness"—and he is tidy, too!

He Beholds the Ocean

On the beach brother and sister would score Hornby's centuries. That was the chief use and joy of the sands to the enthusiasts; the whole series of triumphs would be thus shiftingly writ in full particularity. To Colwyn Bay he went before Ushaw, and after, and he went also to Kent's Bank, near Ulverstone, to Holyhead and New Brighton, so that it may be wondered why his poetry harbours so few seas. Topographically, his verse is very bare of allusion. The chapter of his childhood must close without the benefits of such witness, unless, as indeed it should be, the whole body of his poetry is taken as the evidence of his teeming experiences. Only in a nonsense verse found in his notebook (where doggerel keeps close, as the grave-digger to Hamlet, to the exquisite fragments of his poetry, so that strings of puns must be disentangled from chains of images) does he confess the place-names of his childhood. Runs the doggerel:—

> All along the gliding Lyne
> They told the nymphs of mislaid wine,
> And only by the mooney Med
> They found it had got in the driver's head.

In "Dream Tryst" one early allusion is found. That poem, he writes, "was addressed to a child. Nay, hardly that—to the memory only of a child known but once when I was eleven years old."

CHAPTER II

THE BOY

IN 1870 Francis was sent to Ushaw College, four miles from Durham. By the kind fate that has kept many memories of him alive, his journey thither is remembered by Bishop Casartelli, who wrote to my father at the time of the poet's death:—

"I doubt if I ever saw F. Thompson since his boyhood. I well remember taking him up to Ushaw as a timid, shrinking little boy when he was first sent to college in the late sixties; and how the other boys in the carriage teased and frightened him—for 'tis their nature to—and how the bag of jam tarts in his pocket got hopelessly squashed in the process!"

Timid his journey must have been, for all the crises of his life were timidly and doubtfully encountered. An article by Mgr. Mann and Father Adam Wilkinson in the *Ushaw Magazine* provides first impressions of the new boy:—

"Canon Henry Gillow—the Prefect of that time in the Seminary—assigned him his bedplace, and gave to him two ministering angels in the guise of play-fellows. Then, for initiation, a whinbush probably occupied his undivided attention, and he would emerge from it with a variant on his patronymic appellation! 'Tommy' was he then known to those amongst whom he lived for the next seven years.

"His mode of procedure along the ambulacrum was quite his own, and you might know at the furthest point from him

that you had 'Tommy' in perspective. He sidled along the wall, and every now and then he would hitch up the collar of his coat as though it were slipping off his none too thickly covered shoulder-blades. He early evinced a love for books, and many an hour, when his schoolfellows were far afield, would he spend in the well-stocked juvenile library. His tastes were not as ours. Of history he was very fond, and particularly of wars and battles. Having read much of Cooper, Marryat, Ballantyne, he sought to put some of their episodes into the concrete, and he organised a piratical band."

Another impression comes from Father George Phillips:—

"I was his master in Lower Figures, and remember him very well as a delicate-looking boy with a somewhat pinched expression of face, very quiet and unobtrusive, and perhaps a little melancholy. He always showed himself a good boy, and, I think, gave no one any trouble."

In the *Ushaw Magazine* description, too, you get glimpses of the man. Those shoulder-blades were always ill-covered. The plucking-up of the coat behind was, after the lighting of matches, always the most familiar action of the man we remember; while the tragedy of the tarts seems strangely familiar to one who later shared a thousand patchwork meals with him. Fires he always haunted, and his clothes were burnt on sundry occasions, as they were before the class-room fire. But of the piracy what shall we say? Although he never lost that habit of the collar, and never shook off the crumbs of those tarts, he forgot the way to be a pirate. A good picture of his person is to be had from his friendly schoolfellows' recollections; for his mood we must go to his own. In writing of Shelley

he builds up a poet's boyhood from a poet's own experience:—

"Now Shelley never could have been a man, for he never was a boy. And the reason lay in the persecution which overclouded his school-days. Of that persecution's effect upon him he has left us, in 'The Revolt of Islam,' a picture which to many or most people very probably seems a poetical exaggeration; partly because Shelley appears to have escaped physical brutality, partly because adults are inclined to smile tenderly at childish sorrows which are not caused by physical suffering. That he escaped for the most part bodily violence is nothing to the purpose. It is the petty malignant annoyance recurring hour by hour, day by day, month by month, until its accumulation becomes an agony; it is this which is the most terrible weapon that boys have against their fellow boy, who is powerless to shun it because, unlike the man, he has virtually no privacy. His is the torture which the ancients used, when they anointed their victim with honey and exposed him naked to the restless fever of the flies. He is a little St Sebastian, sinking under the incessant flight of shafts which skilfully avoid the vital parts. We do not, therefore, suspect Shelley of exaggeration: he was, no doubt, in terrible misery. Those who think otherwise must forget their own past. Most people, we suppose, *must* forget what they were like when they were children: otherwise they would know that the griefs of their childhood were passionate abandonment, *déchirants* (to use a characteristically favourite phrase of modern French literature) as the griefs of their maturity. Children's griefs are little, certainly; but so is the child, so is its endurance, so is its field of vision, while its nervous impressionability is keener than ours. Grief is a matter of relativity: the sorrow should be estimated by its proportion to the sorrower; a gash is as painful to one as an amputation to another. Pour a puddle into a thimble, or an Atlantic into Etna; both thimble and mountain overflow. Adult fools! would not the angels smile at *our* griefs, were

not angels too wise to smile at them? So beset, the child fled into the tower of his own soul, and raised the drawbridge. He threw out a reserve, encysted in which he grew to maturity unaffected by the intercourses that modify the maturity of others into the thing we call a man."

The word *reserve* is written large across the history of the schoolboy and the man. That he laid it aside in his poetry, and with the rare friend, made its habitual observance only the more marked. Already at Ushaw, as so often in his later years, he was safest and happiest alone, and little would his schoolfellows understand the distresses of his mind there. Teasing at best is an ignorant occupation; at worst not calculated to live in the memory. Hardly can his contemporaries recognise Thompson's painful memories as being conceivably based on actual experience. I have in mind two gay and gentle men, once his class-fellows, who are unfailingly merry at the mention of college hardships; they are now priests, whose profession and desires are to do kindness to their fellowmen, and I do not suspect them of ever having done a living creature an intentional hurt. Thompson's poetry they can understand, not his unhappiness at Ushaw; it would seem to be easier to accept the difficult poet and his difficult poetry, than a difficult schoolboy. Nor does your normal boy, of Ushaw or any other school, admit that wrong is done him by the rod. His school-days are happy; the cane is only an inconvenience to be avoided, or, if impossible of avoidance, to be grimaced at and tolerated. But every boy at school is not a school-boy, and the boy at school does not fit the generalisation. The school-boy's account of the punish-

ment of the boy at school illustrates the difference. A contemporary writes: " Some old Ushaw men may wonder whether, in his passage through the Seminary, Francis ever fell into the hands of retributive justice. To the best of his schoolfellows' recollections he did. It fell on a certain day during our drilling-hour that Sergeant Railton dropt into confidential tones, and we had grouped round him to drink in his memories of the Indian Mutiny. ' Tommy,' who scented a battle from afar, was with us. All went well until the steps of authority were heard coming round the corner near the music rooms, and with well-simulated sternness our Sergeant ordered us back into our ranks. ' Tommy,' who, doubtless, was already making pictures of Lucknow or Cawnpore on his mental canvas, was last to dress up, and was summarily taken off to Dr. Wilkinson's Court of Petty Sessions, where, without privilege of jury or advocate, he paid his penalty. He was indignant, naturally, not to say sore, over this treatment."

Not his was the gallant and approved vein of school reminiscence, of which one of the classics is the jest about the Rev. James Boyer, the terror of Christ's Hospital: " It was lucky the cherubim who took him to Heaven were nothing but wings and faces, or he would infallibly have flogged them by the way." But Francis did not join in the brave bursts and claps of laughter and winking silences that I have known break in upon the narration of ancient floggings. I am reluctant and ashamed to be less brave on the poet's behalf—to be out of the joke; and yet, remembering him for what he was, I find it difficult to put a better face on it.

When he recalls in a note-book, written in a later time of sickness, and full, it is true, of morbid exaggerations, his own first impressions of school he could not write lightly, as a normal boy would, of those then normal experiences:

"The malignity of my tormentors was more heart-lacerating than the pain itself. It seemed to me—virginal to the world's ferocity—a hideous thing that strangers should dislike me, should delight and triumph in pain to me, though I had done them no ill and bore them no malice; that malice should be without provocative malice. *That* seemed to me dreadful, and a veritable demoniac revelation. Fresh from my tender home, and my circle of just-judging friends, these malignant school-mates who danced round me with mocking evil distortion of laughter—God's good laughter, gift of all things that look back the sun—were to me devilish apparitions of a hate now first known; hate for hate's sake, cruelty for cruelty's sake. And as such they live in my memory, testimonies to the murky aboriginal demon in man."

Being no observer, Francis failed to find the friends he might have found at Ushaw. Henry Patmore, son of Coventry, in a class above him, was as little known to him as he to Henry Patmore. Those who remember Francis as a shy and unusual boy, remember Henry Patmore—"Skinny" Patmore—in much the same terms. It was from Ushaw, where he went in 1870 (Thompson's year), that Henry Patmore wrote to his step-mother:—

"I will begin by telling you I am very happy. I have been much happier during these last two or three months than ever before. . . . My bump of poetry is developing rapidly. For now poetry seems to me to be the noblest

and greatest thing, after religion, on earth. . . . But what I mean by the development of my poetic bump is that I can now see the poetry in Milton, Wordsworth, Papa, and Dante as I never could till quite lately; and I really think that being able to enjoy poetry is a new source of happiness added to my life."

"Paddy" Hearn—the Lafcadio of later life—was an older schoolfellow. He arrived in Ushaw in 1863, a boy of thirteen, but unlike Thompson, mixed a strong rebelliousness with his nervousness, and was neither unhappy nor unpopular, although peculiar, and even "undesirable" from the principal's point of view. Sent there, like Thompson, that he might discover if his inclination lay in the direction of the priesthood, like Thompson he drifted, after Ushaw, to London, and suffered there. He endured his poverty mostly near the docks, but from that he was to emerge, so that his Japanese biographer says of him that "he laughed with the flowers and the birds, and cried with the dying trees"—words which recall F. T.'s "Heaven and I wept together." Again, Hearn matched Thompson—"the conduit running wine of song"—when in a letter he wrote:—

"I think art gives a new faith. I think, all jesting aside, that could I create something I felt to be sublime, I should feel also that the Unknowable had selected me for a mouthpiece, for a medium of utterance, in the holy cycling of its eternal purpose, and I should know the pride of the prophet that has seen the face of God."

Is that the Ushaw spirit? Probably Hearn was too little in touch with the school to have taken away such

aspirations, even had they been in the air. But it is noteworthy that when the time came for him to choose a school for his own son he confessed that

" really much of the ecclesiastical education (bad and cruel as I used to imagine it) is founded on the best experience of man under civilisation; and I understand lots of things I used to think superstitious bosh, and now think solid wisdom."

After the vacation of 1874 Francis went from Seminary to College. There, as a schoolfellow remembers, he came under a master who exerted much influence over him; he was a man of reading and a rare discriminating taste. This probably was the master mentioned by him some years later:

" The death of my old master Mr. Formby I saw in the *Register*. I was deeply sorry. Wishing not to bring myself under anyone's notice until I felt my position more assured, I had abstained from following my first impulse, which was to send him a copy of the magazine containing my Ode. Now I wish I had pocketed my pride and done so. Not knowing my circumstances he may have thought that I had forgotten him. But I had not forgotten him, as I will venture to think he had not forgotten me."

Prowess in English was officially reported. From Father Nowlan, a friend of the family, to Dr. Thompson, Easter, 1872:—

" You will be anxious to hear how Frank has passed at the last examinations. They have been very satisfactory indeed—second in Latin and first in English. His master was speaking to me about him yesterday, and said that his

English composition was the best production from a lad of his age which he had ever seen in this seminary. His improvement in Latin is also remarkable, and his steady improvement in this subject will depend in a great measure upon a cure of that absent-mindedness which certainly, at the very outset, threatened to prove a great obstacle to his application to study."

Another contemporary master, after speaking of his being six times first in Latin, and not so good in Greek, adds:—

"Of his Arithmetic, Algebra, and Geometry the less said the better. He was a good, quiet, shy lad. Physically, a weakling: he had a halting way of walking, and gave the impression that physical existence would be rather a struggle for him. He did practically nothing at the games."

Somebody else recited for him his prose, declaiming "The Storming of the Bridge of Lodi" amid applause in the Hall on a College-Speaking Day. It is the fourteen-year essay of a schoolboy, and fair specimen of the stuff that put him head of his English class. The piece took the ears of his schoolfellows; it was recited by his particular class friend in the school debating-room, and thence, having been heard by the class-master of elocution, was promoted to the Hall, in the company of passages from Macaulay and Gibbon. For such warlike enterprises in prose and a certain occasional straightening of the back and assumption of soldierly bearing the name of "Tommy" was sometimes abandoned for "l'homme militaire."

The habit of humorous verse was already on him, and argues that he was light-hearted at school, even as

the note-books, filled at the time of his greatest depression in after years, argue that he never wholly lacked relief. His joke showed his independence; he was not under the thumb of his distresses. He could put them aside, or accept, or forget, or forbid, or do to them whatever may have been the armouring process.

Of all the essays, in verse or prose, of his Ushaw days, the verses aimed at an invalid master had caught out of the future the most characteristic note. I can hear him say his " Lamente Forre Stephanon " in the deep tremulous voice that he affected for reading, and it hardly comes amiss from the mature tongue:—

Come listen to mie roundelaie,
  Come droppe the brinie tear with me.
Forre Stephanon is gone awaye,
  And long away perchance wille be!
    Our friendde hee is sicke,
    Gone to takke physicke,
    Al in the infirmarie.

Swart was hys dresse as the blacke, blacke nyghte
  Whenne the moon dothe not lyghte uppe the waye,
And hys voice was hoarse as the gruffe Northe winde
  Whenne he swirleth the snowe awaye.
    Our friendde hee is sicke,
    Gone to takke physicke,
    Al in the infirmarie.

Eyn hee hadde lyke to a hawke,
  Soothe I saye, so sharpe was hee
That hee e'en mought see you talke
  Whenne you talkynge did not bee.
    Our friendde hee is sicke,
    Gone to takke physicke,
    Al in the infirmarie.

A copy of the verses fell into the hands of Stephanon, without ill effects; his mighty laugh is still raised, I am told, when he remembers them. The resolve to be a poet is in some of the college verses; the word has not been made poetry, but the spirit is willing and anxious. " Yet, my Soul, we have a treasure not the banded world can take," was the stuff to fill the manuscript book he clutched in recreation hours:—

Think, my Soul, how we were happy with it in the days of yore,
When upon the golden mountains we saw throned the mighty Sun,
When the gracious Moon at night-time taught us deep and mystic lore,
And the holy, wise old forests spoke to us and us alone.

Yes, I loved them ! And not least I loved to look on Ocean's face,
When he lay in peace sublime and evening's shades were stealing on,
When his child, the King of Light, from Heaven stooped to his embrace,
And his locks were tangled with the golden tresses of the Sun.

And much more; in that last he is feeling his way toward the line, to be written in maturity, " Tangle the tresses of a phantom wind."

Of Ushaw walks, another recreation fit for Francis, a companion writes: " In all weathers we tramped the roads, and it must have been at these times (for after he left college he saw little of meadows and hedgerows) that he unconsciously imbibed his wonderful knowledge of the flowers of the field." It was sowing-time and the

soil rich, but an observer, in the exact sense, Francis never was. He would make any layman appear a botanist with easy questions about the commonplaces of the hedges, and a flowered dinner-table in London always kept him wondering, fork in air, as to kinds and names.[1] With nodding laburnum, however, he was already on nodding terms in very early verse:—

The laden laburnum stoops
  In clusters gold as thy hair,
The maiden lily droops
  The fairest where all are fair,
The thick-massed fuchsias show
  In red and in white—thy hue!
In a pendant cloud they spread and glow
  Of crimson, and white, and blue,
In hanging showers they droop their flowers
  Of crimson and white, and crimson and blue.

And of Religion: more pressing than the invitation to the northern road would be the invitation to Ushaw's Chapel. A priest, who was his schoolfellow, writes:

"No Ushaw man need be told how eagerly all, both young and old, hailed the coming of the 1st of May. For that day, in the Seminary, was erected a colossal altar at the end of the ambulacrum nearest the belfry, fitted and adorned by loving zeal. Before this, after solemn procession from St Aloysius', with lighted tapers, all assembled, Professors and students, and sang a Marian hymn. In the College no less solemnity was observed. At a quarter past nine the whole house, from President downwards, assembled in the ante-chapel before our favourite statue. A hymn,

[1] Wilfrid Blunt, who walked some years later over his own acres with Thompson as his guest, wrote: "He could not distinguish the oak from the elm, nor did he know the name of the commonest flower of the field."

selected and practised with great care, was sung in alternate verses by the choir in harmony, and the whole house in unison. 'Dignare me laudare, te, Virgo sacrata,' was intoned by the Cantor; 'Da mihi virtutem contra hostes tuos' thundered back the whole congregation; and the priest, robed already for Benediction, sang the prayer 'Concede, misericors Deus,' etc. Singing Our Lady's *Magnificat*, we filed into St Cuthbert's, and then, as in the Seminary, Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament followed. For thirty-one days, excepting Sundays and holy days, this inspiring ceremonial took place—its memory can never be effaced."

Although it is somewhere affirmed that Francis betrayed no singular piety, we know how devout was his young heart. It was intended for him that he should enter the Church, and he studied for the priesthood. Letters written to his parents by those who had him under observation go to make the history of the case; on September 6, 1871, Father Tatlock wrote:—

"I am sure, dear Mrs. Thompson, that it will be a pleasure and a consolation to you and Dr. Thompson that Frank gives the greatest satisfaction in every way; and I sincerely trust, as you said the other evening, that he will become one day a good and holy priest."

But at the last his ghostly advisers found him unfitted. They held his absent-mindedness to be too grave a disability, and in his nineteenth year he was advised to relinquish all idea of the priesthood. In June 1877 the President wrote a letter proving the goodwill, a quality that may easily collapse before a silent, strange, evasive child, which was felt for Francis:—

"With regard to Frank, I can well appreciate the regret and disappointment which you and his mother must feel.

Frank has always been a remarkably docile and obedient boy, and certainly one of the cleverest boys in his class. Still, his strong, nervous timidity has increased to such an extent that I have been most reluctantly compelled to concur in the opinion of his Director and others that it is not the holy will of God that he should go on for the Priesthood. It is only after much thought, and after some long and confidential conversations with Frank himself, that I have come to this conclusion: and most unwillingly, for I feel, as I said, a very strong regard and affection for your boy. I earnestly pray God to bless him, and to enable you to bear for His sake the disappointment. I agree with you in thinking that it is quite time that he should begin to prepare for some other career. If he can shake off a natural *indolence* which has always been an obstacle with him, he has ability to succeed in any career."

Indolence is one name of many for the abstraction of Francis's mind and the inactivities of his body; but he was not indolent in the struggle against indolence. Not a lifetime of mornings spent in bed killed the desire to be up and doing. In the trembling hand of his last months he wrote out in big capitals on pages torn from exercise books such texts as were calculated to frighten him into his clothes: "Thou wilt not lie a-bed when the last trump blows"; "Thy sleep with the worms will be long enough," and so on. They were ineffectual. His was a long series of broken trysts—trysts with the sunrise, trysts with Sunday mass, obligatory but impossible; trysts with friends. Whether it was indolence or, as he explained it, an insurmountable series of detaining accidents, it is certain that the clock played him false at every stroke, and with such cunning that he would keep an appointment in all good faith six hours after it was past. Dismayed, he would

emerge from his room upon a household preparing for dinner, when he had lain listening to sounds he thought betokened breakfast. He was always behindhand with punctual eve, and in trouble with strict noon.

And yet there must have been the makings of the parish priest, or the hint of them, in his demeanour. "Is that the Frank Thompson I quarrelled about with my neighbouring bishop?" asked Cardinal Vaughan (then Bishop of Salford) when many years later he heard the name of the poet from my father; "each of us wanted him for his own diocese." The ritual of the Church ordered his unorderly life; he was priestly in that he preached her faith and practised her austerities. Nature he ignored till she spoke the language of religion; and he, though secretly much engrossed in his own spiritual welfare, was, priest-like, audible at his prayers —or poetry. His muse was obedient and circumspect as the voice that proclaims the rubrics. He was often merely in Roman orders, so to say, when the critics accused him of breaking the laws of English and common-sense.

Having done no wrong, he yet carried home a disappointment for his parents. It is no light thing to have a son, destined for the sheltered rallying-place of the Church, thrust back into a world he had been well rid of. Nor did his indifference as to his worldly prospects (the disguise, perhaps, of his own disappointment) inspire them with confidence. I have already mentioned that it is thought by many persons well versed in the spiritual affairs of the family that his failure in the Seminary was with him an acute and lasting grief.

CHAPTER III

MANCHESTER AND MEDICINE

AN awed, awkward youth, Francis had yet, before the age of eighteen, experience enough to know how futile for him was the study of medicine. A career in medicine, a career in anything, made no appeal to one who saw himself a man spoiled for the world. Home from his daily lectures, he would, not seldom, shut himself up in his room. His cloister was solitude, and in that painful sanctuary he hid himself from success. He made a pretence of study, and for six years was a medical student.

He had been seven years at Ushaw when he left in July, 1877. Awaiting him at home were the traps of personality. There the opportunity to be himself set on foot and gave courage to all the essential peculiarities of his character. If he had evaded at Ushaw the claims of the community, he now evaded them much more. Although he resumed his play and make-believe with his sisters, he was growing further and further apart from a good understanding with any of his fellow-creatures. Holding himself little bounden to his duties, he soon started on a career of evasion and silence. After a pause of some more months he was examined, and passed with distinction in Greek, for admission as a student of medicine to Owens College. For six years he studied or attempted to study in Manchester, making the journey from Ashton-under-Lyne

under the compulsion of the family eye. But once round the corner he was safe from the too strict inquiry of a father never stern. The hours of his actual attendance at lectures were comparatively few. " I hated my scientific and medical studies, and learned them badly. Now even that bad and reluctant knowledge has grown priceless to me," he wrote in after life.

The Manchester of his studies had little hold of him, and keeps few memories of him. In the wide but mean street leading to Owens College you may, it is true, picture him making a late and lingering way to work, or entering the cook-shops which even then had initiated him in the consumption of bad food (but he long remembered the excellence of one underground restaurant for modest commercial classes), or nervously awaiting the offer of the bookseller for some volume superfluous to a truant student's needs. The thoroughfare is so busy as to disregard, for the most part, the abstracted walk and expression of an eccentric wayfarer. Francis soon learned the art of being lonely in a multitude, and would only occasionally perceive one of the passers who turned and looked after him. Boys provoked to jeer at him he met to his own satisfaction, sometimes with a complete disregard, sometimes with a threatening show of anger. He would congratulate himself upon his tactics, not knowing that he, a young man, was more timid and abashed than any seven-year-old rough of the pavement. The college building, oppressive and awesome in its arches, halls, and corridors, is difficult to reconcile with the timidity with which Francis faced it. Your footsteps " hullo ! " at you in the passages, and must ring with self-assurance or with carelessness

if they are not to echo and exaggerate your doubtful mood. Laughter, the ungentle laughter of medical students—whither, asked Stevenson, go all unpleasant medical students, and whence come all worthy doctors ? —swings down on you or bars you from a corner that you must needs pass. Among the sheltering cases of the deserted museum there is more room for the would-be solitary. Silent mineralogies, fragments, fossils, tell the poet more than the boisterous tongues of the young men. Yorkshire delivered up to the museum a vast saurian and other creatures of the past of whom we hear in the " Anthem of Earth." To the same period belongs the following description made by Mr. J. Saxon Mills, his neighbour:—

" Some few may remember him when, a good many years ago, he used to take his walks up Stalybridge Road, and in the semi-rural outskirts of Ashton. They will recall the quick short step, the sudden and apparently causeless hesitation or full stop, then the old quick pace again, the continued muttered soliloquy, the frail and slight figure. Such was the poet during his studentship at Owens College. An intellectual temperament less adapted to the career of a doctor and surgeon could not be imagined. To such a profession, however, Frank was destined by a careful and practical father."

Those were years of anything but the making of a doctor. To have conformed so little to the style of the medical student boded ill for the expected practitioner. He would even leave his father's reputable doorstep with untied laces, dragging their length on the pavement past the windows of curious and critical neighbours. He did not work, and his idleness was all unlike the idleness proper to his class. He read poetry

in the public library. One sort of idleness, an idleness that gave business to his thoughts for all his life, took him to the museums and galleries. In an essay of the 'nineties he remembers

"the statue which thralled my youth in a passion such as feminine mortality was skill-less to instigate. Nor at this let any boggle; for *she* was a goddess. Statue I have called her; but indeed she was a bust, a head, a face—and who that saw that face could have thought to regard further? She stood nameless in the gallery of sculptural casts which she strangely deigned to inhabit; but I have since learned that men call her the Vatican Melpomene. The expression which gave her divinity resistless I have always suspected for an accident of the cast; since in frequent engravings of her prototype I never met any such aspect. The secret of this indecipherable significance, I slowly discerned, lurked in the singularly diverse set of the two corners of the mouth; so that her profile wholly shifted its meaning according as it was viewed from the right or left. In one corner of her mouth the little languorous firstling of a smile had gone to sleep; as if she had fallen a-dream, and forgotten that it was there. The other had drooped, as of its own listless weight, into a something which guessed at sadness; guessed, but so as indolent lids are easily grieved by the prick of the slate-blue dawn. And on the full countenance these two expressions blended to a single expression inexpressible; as if pensiveness had played the Maenad, and now her arms grew heavy under the cymbals. Thither each evening, as twilight fell, I stole to meditate and worship the baffling mysteries of her meaning: as twilight fell, and the blank noon surceased arrest upon her life, and in the vaguening countenance the eyes broke out from their day-long ambuscade. Eyes of violet blue, drowsed-amorous, which surveyed me not, but looked ever beyond, where a spell enfixed them,

Waiting for something, not for me.

And I was content. Content; for by such tenure of unnoticedness I knew that I held my privilege to worship: had she beheld me, she would have denied, have contemned my gaze. Between us, now, are years and tears; but the years waste her not, and the tears wet her not; neither misses she me or any man. There, I think, she is standing yet; there, I think, she will stand for ever: the divinity of an accident, awaiting a divine thing impossible, which can never come to her, and she knows this not. For I reject the vain fable that the ambrosial creature is really an unspiritual compound of lime, which the gross ignorant call plaster of Paris. If Paris indeed had to do with her, it was he of Ida. And for him, perchance, she waits."

Here already was the artist, the actor in unreal realities. Already he had been thrice in love—with the heroines of Selous's Shakespeare, with a doll, with a statue.

Besides the public galleries, the libraries, and the roads, he had the cricket-field. From the writing of his own and his sister's heroes' scores upon the sands at Colwyn Bay, he and she had taken to back-garden practice of the game. At school he had not played, but neither had he lost his enthusiasm there. Returning from Ushaw, he would go to a friend's garden and play for hours by himself, and bowl for hours at the net, which meant that he had, after each delivery, to retrieve his own ball. He was much at the Old Trafford ground, and there he stored memories that would topple out one over another in his talk at the end of his life. The most historic of the matches he witnessed was that between Lancashire and Gloucestershire in 1878. His sister remembers it, and he celebrates it in the following poem, written in the clear but tragic

light that his devotion to the game shed upon the distant scene of whites and greens:—

It is little I repair to the matches of the Southron folk,
Though my own red roses there may blow;
It is little I repair to the matches of the Southron folk,
Though the red roses crest the caps, I know.
For the field is full of shades as I near the shadowy coast,
And a ghostly batsman plays to the bowling of a ghost,
And I look through my tears on a soundless-clapping host
As the run-stealers flicker to and fro,
To and fro:—
O my Hornby and my Barlow long ago!

It is Glo'ster coming North, the irresistible,
The Shire of the Graces, long ago!
It is Gloucestershire up North, the irresistible,
And new-risen Lancashire the foe!
A Shire so young that has scarce impressed its traces,
Ah, how shall it stand before all resistless Graces?
O, little red rose, their bats are as maces
To beat thee down, this summer long ago!

This day of seventy-eight they are come up North against thee,
This day of seventy-eight, long ago!
The champion of the centuries, he cometh up against thee,
With his brethren, every one a famous foe!
The long-whiskered Doctor, that laugheth rules to scorn,
While the bowler, pitched against him, bans the day that he was born;
And G. F. with his science makes the fairest length forlorn;
They are come from the West to work thee woe!

Nor did Francis's cloistered sister forget. On reading E. V. Lucas's criticisms on her brother's cricket verses (*Cornhill Magazine*, 1907) she wrote to me:

" The article stirred up many old memories, thank God. I can remember seven names out of the Lancashire XI of that match." For thirty years she remembered the seven jolly cricketers, with the seven Joys of Mary, to keep her young. Francis himself was still more faithful: in 1900 he could name all the Lancashire eleven of 1878, and of their opponents all but two.

Other Lancashire heroes and other worship were recorded:—

Sons, who have sucked stern nature forth
From the milk of our firm-breasted north !
Stubborn and stark, in whatever field,
Stand, Sons of the Red Rose, who may not yield !

Gone is Pattison's lovely style,
Not the name of him lingers awhile.
O Lancashire Red Rose, O Lancashire Red Rose !
The men who fostered thee, no man knows.
Many bow to thy present shows,
But greater far have I seen thee, my Rose !

Vernon Royle, says the nun, was one of the Lancashire men; how well Francis remembered him we learn from a review of Ranjitsinhji's book on cricket:—

" Vernon Royle was a magnificent fielder. A ball for which hardly another cover-point would think of trying he flashed upon, and with a single action stopped it and returned it to the wicket. So placed that only a single stump was visible to him, he would throw that down with unfailing accuracy, and without the slightest pause for aim. There were no short runs anywhere in the neighbourhood of Royle. He simply terrorized the batsmen. In addition to his swiftness and sureness, his style was a miracle of grace. Slender and symmetrical, he moved with the lightness of a young roe, the flexuous elegance of a leopard."

The cricket verses are all lamentations for the dead. I doubt if he was ever so happy as when mourning his heroes. To decorate his boyish memories of the departed with rhymed requiems and mature rhythms was one of his few luxuries. The note-books were full of fragments:—

> He that flashed from wicket to wicket
> Like flash of a lighted powder-train ;
> Where is that thunderbolt of cricket ?
> And where are the peers of Charlemain ?
> With this, with this, for an undersong—
> "But where are the peers of Charlemain ?"

At a late London period he proposed to write his cricket memories, gravely justifying his connoisseurship and his qualifications:—

"For several years, living within distance of the O.T. Ground, where successively played each year the chief cricketers of England, where the chief cricketers of Australia played in their periodic visits, and where one of the three Australian test-matches was latterly decided, I saw all the great cricketers of that day, and it was a very rich day. Naturally, I have a few things to say about cricket now and then. . . . The few remarks that follow carefully avoid the province of purely technical criticism, which is rightly engrossed by those who are themselves great cricketers. The only technical criticism worth having in poetry is that of poets, and the same is true of cricket."

Of the true historian of the game he writes: "Nyren —at once the Herodotus and Homer of cricket—an epic writer if ever there was one." His Lancastrian ardour had suffered no diminution when, after an absence from the north and from cricket fields of twenty years, he and I talked cricket. There was a well-established under-

standing between us that he was for the red rose, I for the white. Thus, about a match lost by Lancashire in 1905, he wrote to me:—

"Well done, Yorkshire! your county is coming up hand over hand I see by the placards. I said how it would be, so I am not surprised. Our tail is not plucky."

It was in 1904, I remember, that Thompson's fellow-lodgers, with an eye to comedy as much as to cricket, had persuaded him to meet them at a cricket-net near Wormwood Scrubbs. Of seven men and boys who met there, six had made some compromise with the conventional costume of the game; they could boast a flannelled leg, soft collar, or at least a stud unfastened in deference to a splendid sun; and they were active, and their shadows on the green quite playful. But he was dingy from bootlaces to hatband. Timorously excited and wonderfully intent upon all the preparations, he stiffly waited his turn to bat. When it came he remembered he had no pads on and stayed to strap them with fingers so weak that they were hurt by the buckle with which they fumbled. And then, supremely grave, he batted for the first time since he had faced his sister's bowling on the sands of Colwyn Bay.

I was never at Lord's or the Oval with him, in spite of many plans, and he himself passed the turnstile on very few occasions. But he was always thinking of the cricket he would see, and always for some good reason postponing the day, as for instance in a note written in 1905:—

"I did not go to Lord's. Could not get there before lunch; and getting a paper at Baker Street saw Lancashire

had collapsed and Middlesex were in again. So turned back without getting my ticket—luckily kept from another disappointing day."

Mr. E. V. Lucas has written of the incongruity of Thompson's appearance and his enthusiasm:—

"If ever a figure seemed to say, 'Take me anywhere in the world so long as it is not to a cricket match,' that figure was Francis Thompson's. And his eye supported it. His eye had no brightness: it swung laboriously upon its object; whereas the enthusiasts of St John's Wood dart their glances like birds. But Francis Thompson was born to baffle the glib inference."

It was this unpromising figure that, making its way late at night through St John's Wood, would be stirred with thoughts of the game. Had his mutterings reached the ear of the policeman on the Lord's beat, it would have been known that they were not always so tragically engendered as his mien suggested. The following lines he wrote out for me and posted in the early hours after such a journey:—

The little Red Rose shall be pale at last.
What made it red but the June Wind's sigh?
And Brearley's ball that he bowls so fast?
It shall sink in the dust of the late July!

The pride of the North shall droop at last;
What made her proud but the Tyl-des-lie?
An Austral ball shall be bowled full fast,
And baffle his bat and pass it by.

The Rose once wounded shall snap at last.
The Rose long bleeding it shall not die.
This song is secret. Mine ear it passed
In a wind from the field of Le-bone-Marie.

Francis at Owens College

In 1879 Francis fell ill, and did not recover until after a long bout of fever. He looks stricken and thin in photographs taken at his recovery, and it is probably at this time that he first tasted laudanum. It was at this time too, during his early courses at Owens College, that his mother, without any known cause or purpose, gave him a copy of *The Confessions of an English Opium Eater*. It was a last gift, for she died December 19, 1880. Apart from the immediate consequences of this momentous introduction, fraught with suggestions and sympathies, it greatly serves in the understanding of the opium-eater in general, of the Manchester opium-eater in particular, and of Francis Thompson, to make or renew acquaintance with de Quincey. Readers of the biography of Francis Thompson should also be readers of the *Confessions*, for, without the mighty initiation of that masterly prose, the gateways into the strange and tortuous landscape of dreams can hardly be forced. The style of de Quincey, the habit of his mind, the manner of his confessing, his concealments and sincerities, his association of passion and idleness, his fretfulness and his habit of presaging disaster, his manner of complaining of being cold a-bed, his bulletins, his conscious style and repetitions, serve to bring the personality of Thompson to the memory of those who knew him and into the ken of those who did not. For the family likeness, for the school manner, there are passages in the history of Coleridge, too, that will be found suggestive and explanatory. In knowing these cousins of the habit, you come, as you cannot come by any single and uncorroborated experience, into very convincing touch with him whom you are seeking.

Strong was the allegiance sworn by Francis to the spirit of de Quincey; we track allusions and words and mannerisms in the " Anthem of Earth " back to the *Confessions;* when coincidence of actualities as well as the coincidence of intellect, such as their two flights from Manchester and the two lives in the streets of London, clashed upon the attention of the young man who was withdrawn from the companionship of contemporaries. De Quincey, like Francis, had spent much time in the Manchester library. There both made their vocabularies robust and rare from the same Elizabethans, both fattened to the marrow the bones of their English from Sir Thomas Browne. And both stumbled headlong down a precipice of despondency. De Quincey has said many things on his own behalf, in that despondency and in the recourse to opium, that may well be said on Thompson's.

It happened as if in giving Francis the *Confessions* Mrs. Thompson had found for him a guardian, a spokesman, as if she had borne to him an elder brother. For Francis's feeling for de Quincey soon came to be that of a younger for an elder brother who has braved a hazardous road, shown the way, conquered, and left it strewn with consolations and palliations. From de Quincey he received the passport:

" O just, subtle, and all-conquering opium! that to the hearts of rich and poor alike, for the wounds that will never heal and for the pangs of grief that 'tempt the spirit to rebel,' bringest an assuaging balm:—eloquent opium! that with thy potent rhetoric stealest away the purposes of wrath, pleadest effectually for relenting pity, and through one night's heavenly sleep callest back to the guilty man the visions of

his infancy, and hands washed pure from blood;—O just and righteous opium! that to the chancery of dreams summonest for the triumphs of despairing innocence false witnesses, confoundest perjury, and dost reverse the sentences of unrighteous judges; then buildest upon the bosom of darkness, out of the fantastic imagery of the brain, cities and temples, beyond the art of Phidias and Praxiteles—beyond the splendours of Babylon and Hekatompylos; and, 'from the anarchy of dreaming sleep' cullest into sunny light the faces of long-buried beauties, and the blessed household countenances, cleansed from the 'dishonours of the grave.' Thou only givest those gifts to man; and thou hast the keys to Paradise, O just, subtle, and mighty opium!"

Constitutionally he was a target for the temptation of the drug; doubly a target when set up in the misfitting guise of a medical student, and sent about his work in the middle of the city of Manchester, long, according to de Quincey, a dingy den of opium, with every facility of access, and all the pains that were de Quincey's excuse. He took opium at the hands of de Quincey and his mother, "giver of life, death, peace, distress." That the life opium conserved in him triumphed over the death opium dealt out to him shall be part argument of this book. On the one hand, it staved off tuberculosis; it gave him the wavering strength that made life just possible, whether on the streets or through all those other distresses and discomforts that it was his character deeply to resent but not to remove by any normal courses. It made doctoring or any sober course of life even more impracticable than it was already rendered by incapacity, and to his failure in such careers we owe his poetry. On the other hand, it dealt with him remorselessly as it dealt with Coleridge and all its consumers.

It put him in such constant strife with his own conscience that he had ever to hide himself from himself, and for concealment he fled to that which made him ashamed, until it was as if the fig-leaf were of necessity plucked from the Tree of the Fall. It killed in him the capacity for acknowledging those duties to his family and friends which, had his heart not been in shackles, he would have owned with no ordinary ardour.

It is on account of a hundred passages of the *Confessions* that the friendship was established. What solace of companionship must Francis have discovered when de Quincey told him, " But alas ! my eye is quick to value the logic of evil chances. Prophet of evil I ever am to myself; forced for ever into sorrowful auguries that I have no power to hide from my own heart, no, not through one night's solitary dreams." Here was a boon though sorrowful companion. For here was one who could translate his distresses into a brave art; one who could extract good writing out of his disabilities. Doubtless it was he who first showed to Francis the profitableness of bitter experiences, and that, if gallant prose might come of weakness, poetry might be sown in the fields of failure, and the crown of thorns be turned to the chaplet of laurel.

Very like de Quincey's repudiation of guilt would have been Francis's:—

" Infirmity and misery do not, of necessity, imply guilt. They approach, or recede from, the shades of that dark alliance in proportion of the probable motives and prospects of the offender, and to the palliations, known or secret, of the offence; in proportion as the temptations to it were

potent from the first, and as the resistance to it, in act or in effort, were earnest to the last."

De Quincey published his offences and defences, prosecuted, summed up, and reported in his own case; and it was upon his ruling that Francis built up his own subtler arguments, advanced and judged *in camera*.

Unlike de Quincey, he had no burning desire to justify himself; his own private excuse he had no desire to strengthen with the written and published word, or by seeking the corroborating context of others. He was consistently silent and secret on the point, and, if his silence did not avail to hide his secret, he was still silent in the manner of the lover who stole a kiss in "The Angel in the House": we knew that he knew we knew about his drug. His pleading was not before man's tribunal, but before the higher courts of conscience and of poetry. During his first experiences of the opium he had not the consolatory knowledge of his genius, for it was only in later years, when he was delivered of his poetry and beheld it emerge unmarred by his former surrender to the drug, that he found peace of mind.

"Opium, the saving of my life," is one of Thompson's own most rare allusions to it. For de Quincey he never abated his old ardour of respect.

It has been doubted whether he actually "sat" for his medical examination, but, considering how little bold he was among strangers and in a strange town, it is unlikely that on this first occasion he summoned enough courage to play truant. In all probability he was conducted to the place of examination, but one can only conjecture his behaviour as he was more than usually silent on his return. "I have not passed" is all the

information he vouchsafed when, some little time after, he is supposed to have received notice of his failure. Two years more of pretended study followed, with some real reading at home in the evenings. It was Francis's quickness of intelligence during these extra hours of more congenial research that enabled him to appear in conversation with his father as one moderately well equipped in the knowledge of medicine. But when Francis again visited London in 1882, after four years in all of study, and again returned with the formula of " I have not passed," his father called upon the authorities at Owens College, and learnt that Francis's non-attendances were far in advance of his attendances. During two more years of preparation he read less and less at home. He would come in late in the evening, declaring that a professor or a lecturer had taken him to give him extra instruction, and not till some time afterwards was it discovered that the house he visited was the home of a musician, and the instruction that of listening to music performed upon the piano. Of music he was extremely fond: his interest in it would be passionate or else totally obscured when, in later years, there was music going forward in his presence.

Calling it his chief recreation, he continued for years without it. For Berlioz he kept the excited enthusiasm of a child, childish memory doing the trick. He would often tell of music (Berlioz, Beethoven, Chopin) heard in Manchester, where he attended concerts with his mother. He himself could no more than strike a sequence of chords upon the piano, which he would do with so much earnestness that I, as a child, was impressed by his performance. In listening to music his

emotion was equally manifest. Standing at the piano, he would gaze at the performer, his body wavering to and fro in tremulous pleasure; or, as often, he would not heed at all.

It was decided that his third attempt upon the profession of medicine should be made at Glasgow, where degrees were more easily to be obtained. But the examination, if indeed it was actually accepted, was approached with no endeavour or even anxiety, except on the father's part, for success. Indeed, failure must have been very frankly courted by Francis, whose main fault was that he had not the courage openly to dispute his father's decision in regard to a career. Never once did he intimate that his heart was set on poetry, although from sixteen, as he afterwards said, he studied and practised metre; it is not unlikely that to have been told to go and make a business of literature would have been more irksome to him than passing the years in the evasion of medicine. His secret absorption in his own interests was, after all, not uncomfortably circumstanced during all these years, for it is certain that literature was a second life to Francis which could be lived alone most happily. After failure in Glasgow, Francis met with a severe show of impatience and disappointment from his father. Many trials had been tolerated at the son's hands, hundreds of pounds had been expended, and the son's future was less secure than ever. Dr. Thompson determined on such courses as he thought would compel Francis to some undertaking of the responsibilities of life.

No little money had been spent on examination fees to examiners who probably had no papers to examine;

on dissecting fees which did not once compel Francis's presence at the dissecting-table. He was already spending money on opium. After many leniencies, such as accepting Francis's own account of his studies at Owens College and all his excuses for absences from home in the evening, Dr. Thompson put Francis to such obviously uncongenial tasks as were to be found in the establishment of a surgical instrument maker, whom he served for two weeks only, and as the purveyor of an encyclopaedia. At neither of these businesses did Francis succeed; it took him two months to read the encyclopaedia, and then he discarded it, unsold. Nor was there any possibility of success. In reviewing his prospects at this time his father warned him, among other things, that he would have to enlist if he found no other means of support. Without a word, Francis went, like Coleridge, for a soldier. With what hopes or intentions it is difficult to conceive, but obviously still with that desire of obeying, so far as he was able, his father's instructions. It seems he did not suffer himself merely to be measured by the recruiting examiners, but also to be marched and drilled in the attempt to expand his chest to the necessary inches. He spoke in later years of the weariness it was to march, and of the barrack yard, and even maintained that his upright bearing had been learnt at that time. But as his upright bearing is exactly the upright bearing of a brave figure (his sister's), stiffer than the starched gear about her face and throat in the habit and convent of her order in Manchester, it does not follow that Francis's recruiting counts for very much. He returned from it late one night, silent as when he returned from the

examinations in London and Glasgow. I do not think he even told the family as much as he told my father in later years—that he was not "Private Thompson" only because he failed to pass the army physical examination.

On the second Sunday in November 1885, Francis was forced to find time for the discussion of his prospects with his father, and with it he found a certain energy of failure and despair. His demeanour gave rise to the notion in his family that he was in the habit of drinking. His father taxed him with it, but was mystified by Francis's strenuous denials; perhaps opium, perhaps excitement, was the cause of his strangeness. At any rate there was grave misunderstanding. The next day his sister found on her dressing-table a note from Francis saying that he had gone to London. It was a hopeless note; his mood was hopeless. He later described his flight thus: "The peculiarity in my case is that I made the journey to the Capital without hope, and with the gloomiest forebodings, in the desperate spirit of an *enfant perdu*." But in hopelessness, as in all his moods, he hesitated. He did not want to leave home. "To stay under happy parental supervision, to work because I must, but to make my delight of the exercise of the imagination" was his ambition.

For a week he lingered in Manchester, living on the proceeds of the sale of his books and other possessions. It had been his habit to obey the command of the drug by the disposal of his books and medical instruments. His microscope had gone, and been replaced—no light task for his father—and now, at the crisis, he

had to go bare even of poetry books. Ninety-five would he sell, but to the remnant of a library he would cling with a persistence that defied even the terrific imp of the laudanum bottle. For a week Francis hesitated and then wrote home, dating his letter from the Manchester Post Office, for his fare to London. It was sent, and he made the journey. London, of conjectural disaster, drew him from the Manchester of tried and proved failure. His luggage, scanty enough in itself, was weighted with no regrets. But he carried Blake and Aeschylus in his pocket. Thus had de Quincey gone, content with the same bodily starvation and mental food—" carrying a small parcel with some articles of dress under my arm; a favourite English poet in one pocket, and an odd volume, containing one-half of Canter's *Euripides* in the other."

Of the father and the fugitive the poet's uncle afterwards wrote to my father:—

" He has been a great trouble and sorrow to his father from his want of ballast. He started with every advantage, but has come to nothing. At last he went to London, where he seems to have led a sort of Bohemian life. There does not appear to have been anything of what is usually termed immorality; but he was never to be depended on, and I fear he indulged in drink. As his father expresses it in a letter to me this morning, he likes to lead a dawdling, sauntering sort of life. . . . There was nothing in his home life to lead him to divulge himself, no encouragement and no sympathy with his ambitions."

But Francis had another opinion of the poetic influence of his home. His statement stands that " the

spirit of such poems as ' The Making of Viola ' and ' The Judgement in Heaven ' is no mere medieval imitation, but the natural temper of my Catholic training in a simple provincial home." The father's own comment, when he found his son welcomed as a poet, was: " If the lad had but told me !"

CHAPTER IV

LONDON STREETS

IT might be supposed that the city of Manchester was as good as another in which to be destitute; poverty in modern streets is a mean and dirty business at its best as at its worst. But in London a staggering part is played on a great stage haunted with great presences. It was something to tread the pavements of Oxford Street, something to depair, if despair one must, where Chatterton despaired; fitting, in a poetic sense, as Francis had discovered when he wrote " In no Strange Land," to have your Christ walking on the dark waters of the Thames, and to rear your Jacob's ladder from Charing Cross. But if there is a ghostly companionship in the capital, it was mightily empty of the real solace of friendly presences. " The only fostering soil for genius," Lamb called the Metropolis. But Francis did not so regard it. The writing of the first poems and prose, the whole acceptance of a vocation, were undertaken in complete isolation. There were no allurements of companionship, no excitements or encouragements of example and emulation. He knew no laughing bookseller in St Martin's Court. A poet, he knew no poet, save a formidable uncle, in the flesh; no writer, save the reputed " noted authors " whom he came to serve with slippers at a shop in Panton Street. Without friends or courage, Francis found no better job than that of a " collector "

in the book-trade. Thus his first efforts for a livelihood in London were made with a sackful of literature upon his shoulders, the day's " orders " of a general bookseller. His journeys would be laborious and slowly accomplished, and his turn in all probability the last served at the wholesale counters where he called out the list.

That he found no work commensurate with his attainments is but another item in the whole sequence of circumstances that liken his case to de Quincey's. De Quincey tells of difficulties imagined and real that kept him from applying to the friends of his father for assistance. Francis too would often expound excellent reasons for not doing that which it had never occurred to him to undertake. The truth was that he came to London that he might exist and no more.

That each was befriended by a girl of the streets was a continuation of the duality of contradictions. Two outcast women were to these two outcast men the sole ambassadors of the world's gentleness and generosity. He was quick to lose his " book-collecting," slow to find other work. He liked the Guildhall Library better than " situations," and, while he had seven shillings a week from home, he managed to be there a good deal. He spoke of having clung to outward respectability, and told that on the streets rags are no necessary accompaniment to destitution. But his rags came quickly enough; within a few weeks he was below the standards set by the employers of casual labour. He now began to learn something of his companions, of their slang, of their ways and means. It was not always amongst the lowest grades of the poor that he

met the people he could most dislike. He notes that the street-outcast is generally opposed to Atheism; that he is often nameless, often kind, mostly honest with his fellows (" only once did any one try to cheat me "). Generosity he noticed particularly in the readiness of beggars to pay each other's lodgings. Once a policeman aided him, but that aid was unexpected and unrepeated. Of the men he met at common lodging-houses, or in whose company he slept in archways, or with whom he entered into partnership in the business of fetching cabs or selling matches, he names but very few: " The actor, poor Kelsall, ' Newcastle,' " is one entry in a note-book. The murderer to whom he makes several allusions, he disguises under the initials D. I. He met and had talk with him about the fire of a common lodging-house. And when it was not in a common lodging-house it was at a Shelter or Refuge that Francis would lie in one of the oblong boxes without lids, containing a mattress and a leathern apron or coverlet, that are the fashion, he says, in all Refuges. " Their conversation is impossible of report. If you want to know it (and you are every way a gainer by not knowing it, while you lose what can never be regained by knowing it) go to Rabelais and his like, where you will find a very faint image of it. Nearer you may get by reading ' Westminster Drolleries ' and other eighteenth century collections of swine-trough hoggery. For naked bestiality you must go to the modern *bête humaine*." He learnt enough of their slang to be amused at the unreality of language put into the mouths of the thieves of fiction; and in any case the foulness of the real thing is irreproducible. He learned, too, of

the workhouse, of homes of refuge; that prison is held to be no disgrace; and above all, as month succeeded month, that death is surprisingly slow on a shilling a day.

His bed was made according to his fortune. If he had no money, it was the Embankment; if he had a shilling, he could choose his lodging; if he had fourpence, he was obliged to tramp to Blackfriars. Something of his manner of spending his money he told me: "No, Evi, you do not spend your penny on a mug of tea. That will be gone very quickly. You spend it, Evi, not on a mug of tea; not, I say, on a *mug* of tea, but on the tea itself. You buy a pennyworth and make it with the boiling water from the common kettle in the doss-house. You get several cups that way instead of one." It was at lodging-houses that he would lie watching the beetles crawling on the ceiling—that was the exchange he made for "the abashless inquisition of each star" of the nights when he had no pennies and so no indoor bed. The time came when for a week his only earning was sixpence got for holding a horse's head. That was after he had made an attempt to establish himself with a bootblack stand, and failed because of the interference of the police, who moved him on at the request of the shopkeeper at his chosen street-corner.

Every man, and every woman, acquires a certain aptitude in the University of the Last Resort. Some sort of shrewdness, entirely above the scullery pitch, has become a necessity by the time the pavement is the Home. And even the poet came, like the outcast ostler, or matchmaker, or scullery-maid, to possess a

small share of this lower-worldliness. When it was a matter, during the day, of collecting coppers sufficient for the day and spending them in the pinched markets of poverty, he had perforce to be alive to the world about him. Later on, when there was no necessity, I could observe in him a certain flickering pride of experience: occasionally he would exert himself to show that he knew how to pass the time of day with a man upon the street, how to invest in a pipe, a kettle, or in oddments of cheap food. Ordering his meal at a coffee-house, he would pretend to a certain acumen in the matter of dishes or of waitresses, adjusting his tie and his expression. But who can ever have been deceived that here was anyone save a timorous defaulter in the matter of *savoir-faire ?* Not, certainly, an A.B.C. girl or an observant tramp.

Among the miracles is that of The Golden Halfpennies. They came to him on a day when he had not even the penny to invest in matches that might bring him interest on his money. He was, he told me, walking, vacant with desperation, along a crowded pavement, when he heard the clink of a coin and saw something bright rolling towards the gutter. He stooped, picked it up, looked around, found no claimant, and put into his waistcoat pocket, as he affirmed with the many repetitions that characterised his anecdotes, a bright new halfpenny. He proceeded some distance on his way, pondering the things he could or could not procure with his money, when it struck him that the other direction would lead him to a shop with such wares as he had decided on. As he neared the place where he had found the first coin he saw another

glittering in the road. This, too, he picked up, and again thought he held a halfpenny. But looking closer he discovered it to be golden and a sovereign, and only after much persuasion of his senses would he believe the first-found one to be likewise gold. " That was a sovereign too, Evi; I looked and I saw it was a sovereign too !" he ended, with rising voice and tremulous laughter. One who heard him tell his tale held strictly that he should have delivered the money to the nearest police-station to await the inquiry of its owner; but that, surely, were an ill economy, to look after the farthings of scrupulousness at the cost of the pounds of Providence. Thompson, half suspicious of a miracle, made a shrewd guess that no angel would apply at Marlborough Street.

At another time he did have scruples. One of the Rothschilds, buying a paper from him at the Piccadilly end of Park Lane, put a florin into his hand. " I was worried," said Francis, " lest he thought it was a penny, and tried to catch him up in the street crowd. But he was gone, and it worried me." Years later when the news of that Rothschild's death was read out at a meal at our house, Francis dropped his spoon: " Then I can never repay him !" he cried, telling us the story.

For a time a few shillings might have been his each week for the fetching; but he did not fetch them. An allowance, sufficient to lodge and feed him, and insufficient to do either fully, was sent to him by his father at a reading-room called, it is thought, the " Clarendon," in the Strand. The more he needed it the greater worry would it seem to collect it. Fear lest it were not there, fear lest he should be refused it

because of his rags, and, finally, an illusory certainty—the certainty of dejection—that it had been discontinued, prevented him, until at last, through his default, it did really cease.

He had the words of the Proverb by heart—" Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food convenient for me "—but he would rather say his prayer in the street than ask for his allowance in the " Clarendon." He was willing to starve both ways: he wrote out for his comfort: " Even in the night-time of the soul wisdom remains."

The time came when he had no lodging; when the nights were an agony of prevented sleep, and the days long blanks of half-warmth and half-ease. After seven nights and days of this kind he is deep immersed in insensibility. Pain, its own narcotic, throbs to painlessness. Touch and sight and hearing are brokenly and dimly experienced, save when some unknown touch switches on the lights of full consciousness. Sensation is still painful, but disjointedly, impotently. He sees things pass as silently as the figures on a cinematograph screen; one set of nerves, out of time and on another plane, respond to things heard. The boys now running at one end of the alley, in front of him, are behind him the next, and their cries seem to come from any quarter and at random. Is it that they move too quickly for him or that he unknowingly is wheeling about in his walk, or that London herself spins round him? For hours he has stood in one place, or paced one patch of pavement, as if his feet were trapped in the lines between the stones. He remembers that, as a child, he had made rules, treading only on the spaces, or only on the line

of the pattern; now they make much stricter bounds. He is tied to the few slabs of stone that fill the space beneath his archway. It seems dreadfully perilous to move beyond them, and he sways within their territory as if they edged a precipice. And then, he knows not how or why, his weakness has passed, and he is drifting along the streets, not wearily, but with dreadful ease, with no hope of having sufficient resolution to halt. Time matters as little to him as the names of the streets, and the very faces of the clocks present, to his thinking, not pictures of time and motion, but stationary, dead countenances. Noting that the hands of one have moved, he wonders at it only because its view of the passage of time is so laughably at variance with his own. The street-names, too, deceived him; they were unfamiliar in most familiar places; or they showed well-known names on impossible corners. He seemed to be spinning, like a falling leaf, and tossed by unseen winds of direction. Then out of confusion came a voice, " Is your soul saved ?" It broke in upon his half-consciousness as the school gong wakes the boy. The mantle of protecting delirium fell away; the voice broke in upon his privacy, threatening his reserves, seeking the confidences of the confessional. " What right have you to ask me that question ?" he replied.

To one who had spent a fortnight of such nights on the streets, it was not, as he recounted it, the chance of rescue that seemed so important as this rebuff, administered with what gesture of sternness and dignity his condition would allow, to an intruder. He was as little ready then for that help as two years later he was for my father's.

But among those who sought to help and were successful was Mr. John McMaster, a churchwarden of St-Martin-in-the-Fields. He not only talked with the inaccessible Francis, but persuaded him to accept employment at his bootmaker's shop, No. 14 Panton Street, Haymarket, in August 1886.[1] A first-hand narrative of this encounter is given in Mr. McMaster's book on St Martin-in-the-Fields:—

"My first knowledge of Thompson was through seeing, when passing hurriedly along the Strand one cold night, a poor fellow standing in the gutter holding some matches. Going next night, and seeing him still there, I spoke to him and he told me some of his past life.

"Relieving his immediate wants, and telling him to meet me in three days, I made official enquiries and found his statements correct.

"It was a very difficult case to know what to do with, so I made room for him in my shop in place of a boy. My doctor saw him, and gave his opinion that with good food and more congenial surroundings he would doubtless pull up again, and this proved to be correct. For with other clothes, plenty to eat, and things brighter, he soon looked very different and he tried his best to please. My workmen, who were not always agreeable to outsiders, in this case were friendly; but Thompson's great delight was taking my little orphan niece (who lived with me) out with him on any little message, or spending some time in St James' Park feeding the ducks, or playing about the shop. They were very 'chummy.'" (It is remembered that this little friend, called Rosie Violet or Rosebud by her family, was Flower or Little Flower to Francis.) "He was a reader and fond of the classical poets and preferred Homer's *Odysseus* and *Iliad* to other books one lent him.

[1] Francis did not know then that the "little obscure room in my father's poor house," where Traherne learnt, as a child of four, to be a poet, was also at the back of a shoemaker's.

Mr. McMaster was interested in assisting the unfortunate. If he says "Thompson was my only failure," it means that he was careful and useful in rescuing young men, particular in awarding his charity, and strict in enforcing reform. How, then, did Mr. McMaster succeed so well with his only failure? It is to his exceeding credit that he accepted Francis on the terms that were inevitable in accepting a waif subject to accidents and unpunctual. Francis would discuss literature and medicine, or be silent, or write, always in sight of the hammering and sewing group in the workroom behind the shop. In the delivery of goods and the general running of messages he did ill the duties of a boy of twelve. And yet he was liked, and respected as well as pitied. His dignity and gentleness gave him the name of a gentleman among friends where the title is a talisman.

It did not take long to discover that Francis could neither make boots nor sell them. He ran messages, and, still in the make-believe of earning his food and lodging and the five shillings a week that were his wages, put up the shutters, as H. M. Stanley, whose back still ached with the memory when he came to write his autobiography, had done as a boy. It is incredible, to one who knew the hours Francis favoured, that he was present at their taking down.

Mr. McMaster also remembers that he was informed immediately that Francis was a Catholic, and he remembers the crucifix upon the wall of the bedroom in Southampton Row, and the medal round the collarless neck; he has it too that Francis "said his Mass—always said his Mass—at night." To that reminiscence may

be added the poet's own later record of his habits of prayer: " It was my practice from the time I left college to pray for the lady whom I was destined to love—the unknown She. It is curious that even then I did not dream of praying for her whom I was destined to marry; and yet not curious: for already I previsioned that with me it would be to love, not to be loved."

After rather more than three months' service in the shop, it was arranged that Francis should go home for the Christmas of 1886. There is not much to tell of his home-coming. Other members of the Thompson family were adepts, like Francis, in reserve, and it was practised rigorously during his holiday. It was known that he had suffered; and his sufferings, or the occasion of them, were no more to be spoken of than misdeeds that had had their punishment. He volunteered no account of himself and was asked for none, it being supposed that he had found a settled though humble way of life which allowed the past to fall back into the past. From his sister I learn that he filled his place in the family saddened, perhaps, but yet much as he had filled it before he left it: affection was there, on his side and on hers.

" Whatever the cause," wrote Mr. McMaster, " after his return to Panton Street, the drug habit recommenced, and, though we tried to influence him to stop it, our efforts were useless, and after some months I was reluctantly compelled to part with him, though he often passed the shop in the well-known brown suit and overcoat he went away in."

Before he left, Francis had sent manuscripts, Mr. McMaster avers, to more than one magazine; for the

discarded McMaster account-books had all the while been as freely covered with poetry and prose as had been the bulky business folios of Mme. Corot, Marchande de Modes, with Jean Baptiste Camille's landscapes of pen and ink. But Francis left Panton Street unanswered; he left Panton Street for less kindly thoroughfares. Nor did he ever return, though immediately after his dismissal he came to be in desperate need of any charity.

As he stood on the threshold of the shop—" Still, as I turned inwards to the echoing chambers, or outwards to the wild, wild night, I saw London extending her visionary gate to receive me, like some dreadful mouth of Acheron " (de Quincey's words became his own by right of succession)—he was in no mood to fight for existence. He gave himself to Covent Garden, the archways, and more desperate straits—" a flood-tide of disaster "—than he had known before.

I know that Thompson suffered hunger; so much he told me. Misery is a bottle-imp which you may put to your lips without going through the swing-doors of experience. Francis came back through them with a light heart, while that of a Charlotte Brontë imagining starvation for a character in a novel was heavy with inexperience. Many of the horrors of the street, Francis knew only in later years, when the bandages with which nature covers the eyes of those whom she condemns were removed. He had walked the battlefield among bullets and not known that one nestled in his heart, another in his brain, another in his flesh; only twenty years later did he grow weak with their poison, and develop a delirium of fear of the sights and

sounds of London. It was in later years that he wrote: "The very streets weigh upon me. Those horrible streets, with their gangrenous multitude blackening ever into lower mortifications of humanity. . . . We lament the smoke of London:—it were nothing without the fumes of congregated evil."[1] It was later, too, that he wrote of

the places infamous to tell,
Where God wipes not the tears from any eyes.

There is more in the same strain of heated hate and distress, but I quote no more, in the belief that it is far from illustrating his mood when he was actually on the

[1] Of the despoiling of the Lady Poverty he writes in an unpublished poem:

DEGRADED POOR

Lo, at the first, Lord, Satan took from Thee
Wealth, Beauty, Honour, World's Felicity.
Then didst Thou say: "Let be;
For with his leavings and neglects will I
Please Me, which he sets by."

My simple Lord! so deeming erringly,
Thou tookest Poverty;
Who, beautified with Thy Kiss, laved in Thy streams,
'Gan then to cast forth gleams,
That all men did admire
Her modest looks, her ragged sweet attire
In which the ribboned shoe could not compete
With her clear simple feet.

But Satan, envying Thee Thy one ewe-lamb,
With Wealth, World's Beauty and Felicity
Was not content, till last unthought-of she
Was his to damn.
Thine ingrate ignorant lamb
He won from Thee; kissed, spurned, and made of her
This thing which qualms the air—
Vile, terrible, old,
Whereat the red blood of the Day runs cold.

streets. He realised that " In suffering, intensity has not long duration; long duration has not intensity"; or again: " Beyond the maximum point of a delicate nature you can no more get increase of agony by increasing its suffering than you can get increase of tone from a piano by stamping on it. It would be an executioner's trick of God if he made the poet-nature not only capable of a pang where others feel a prick, but of hell where others feel purgatory." One learns from almost the same page of his contradictory notes that he knew suffering beyond the range of other men's knowledge, but that, knowing it, he also knew the narrow limits of suffering.

Above all things, he learnt that lack of the world's goods is small lack, that to lose everything is no great loss—a proposition easily proved by analogy to those who have gained everything and found it small gain. While in the streets he had his tea to drink and his murderer to think about. It was in retrospect that he beheld misery incarnate in the outcast, and it was through the sheltering pane of a window in a lodging that he saw:—

" a region whose hedgerows have set to brick, whose soil is chilled to stone; where flowers are sold and women; where the men wither and the stars; whose streets to me on the most glittering day are black. For I unveil their secret meanings. I read their human hieroglyphs. I diagnose from a hundred occult signs the disease which perturbs their populous pulses. Misery cries out to me from the kerb-stone, despair passes me by in the ways; I discern limbs laden with fetters impalpable, but not imponderable; I hear the shaking of invisible lashes, I see men dabbled with their own oozing life. This contrast

rises before me; and I ask myself whether there be indeed an Ormuzd and an Ahriman, and whether Ahriman be the stronger of the twain. From the claws of the sphinx my eyes have risen to her countenance which no eyes read. Because, therefore, I have these thoughts; and because also I have knowledge, not indeed great or wide, but within certain narrow limits more intimate than most men's, of this life which is not a life; to which food is as the fuel of hunger; sleep, our common sleep, precious, costly, and fallible, as water in a wilderness; in which men rob and women vend themselves—for fourpence; because I have such thoughts and such knowledge, I needed not the words of our great Cardinal to read with painful sympathy the book just put forward by a singular personality."[1]

Of the things he heard—and misery, he says, cries out from the kerbstone—the laugh, not the cry, of the children familiar with all evil was what appalled him most. Appalling, too, was the unuttered cry of children who knew not how to cry nor why they had cause. Among the notes are many jottings of a resolve to write on the young of the town, but these were used only incidentally in essays or letters. Such a one is found in the passage of his study of Saint John Baptist de la Salle, in which he states the case for Free Education:—

"Think of it. If Christ stood amidst your London slums, he could not say: 'Except ye become as one of *these* little children.' Far better your children were cast from the bridges of London, than they should become as one of those little ones. Could they be gathered together and educated in the truest sense of the word; could the children of the nation at large be so educated as to cut off future recruits to the ranks of Darkest England; then it would need no

[1] His review of Booth's *In Darkest England*. Manning was the Cardinal.

astrology to cast the horoscope of to-morrow. *La tête de l'homme du peuple*, nay rather *de l'enfant du peuple*—around *that* sways the conflict. Who grasps the child grasps the future."

A monastic segregation of the sexes is often the rule of the outcast's road. Francis had but one friend among the women-folk or children of London, and often passed months without having speech of any save men. When he was again among friends, and knew the children of *Sister Songs*, he wrote:—

All vanished hopes, and all most hopeless bliss,
Came with thee to my kiss.
And ah ! so long myself had strayed afar
From child, and woman, and the boon earth's green,
And all wherewith life's face is fair beseen—
Journeying its journey bare
Five suns, except of the all-kissing sun
Unkissed of one;
Almost I had forgot
The healing harms,
And whitest witchery, a-lurk in that
Authentic cestus of two girdling arms.

Meanwhile, one girl gave out of her scant opulence, consisting of a room, and food, and a cab thereto. When the streets were no longer crowded with shameful possibilities she would think of the only tryst that her heart regarded and, a natural sister of charity, would take her beggar into her vehicle at the appointed place and cherish him with an affection maidenly and motherly, and passionate in both these capacities. Two outcasts, they sat marvelling that there were joys for them to unbury and to share. Weakness and con-

fidence, humility and reverence, were gifts unknown to her except at his hands, and she repaid them with graces as lovely as a child's, and as unhesitating as a saint's. In his address to a child of our family, in a later year, he remembers this poor girl's street-childishness:—

Forlorn, and faint, and stark
I had endured through watches of the dark
The abashless inquisition of each star,
Yea, was the outcast mark
Of all those heavenly passers' scrutiny;
Stood bound and helplessly
For Time to shoot his barbèd minutes at me;
Suffered the trampling hoof of every hour
In night's slow-wheelèd car;
Until the tardy dawn dragged me at length
From under those dread wheels; and, bled of strength,
I waited the inevitable last.
Then there came past
A child; like thee, a spring-flower; but a flower
Fallen from the budded coronal of Spring,
And through the city-streets blown withering.
She passed,—O brave, sad, lovingest, tender thing!
And of her own scant pittance did she give,
That I might eat and live:
Then fled, a swift and trackless fugitive.
Therefore I kissed in thee
The heart of Childhood, so divine for me;
And her, through what sore ways
And what unchildish days,
Borne from me now, as then, a trackless fugitive.
Therefore I kissed in thee
Her, child! and innocency.

Her sacrifice was to fly from him: learning that he had found friends, she said that he must go to them and leave her. After his first interview with my father he

had taken her his news. "They will not understand our friendship," she said, and without warning went to unknown lodgings and was lost to him. In "the mighty labyrinths of London" he lay in wait for her, nor would he leave the streets, thinking that in doing so he would make a final severance. Like de Quincey's Ann, she was sought, but never found, along the pavements at the place where she had been used to find him.

CHAPTER V

THE DISCOVERY

A RALLY, probably the result of a gift from Manchester, came about in the latter half of February 1887. I quote his own words: "With a few shillings to give me breathing space, I began to decipher and put together the half-obliterated manuscript of 'Paganism.' I came simultaneously to my last page and my last halfpenny; and went forth to drop the MS. in the letter-box of *Merry England*.[1] Next day I spent the halfpenny on two boxes of matches, and began the struggle for life." This was the covering letter to the editor:—

"*Feb. 23rd*, '87.—Dear Sir,—In enclosing the accompanying article for your inspection I must ask pardon for the soiled state of the manuscript. It is due, not to slovenliness, but to the strange places and circumstances under which it has been written. For me, no less than Parolles, the dirty nurse experience has something fouled. I enclose stamped envelope for a reply, since I do not desire the return of the manuscript, regarding your judgement of its worthlessness as quite final. I can hardly expect that where my prose fails my verse will succeed. Nevertheless,

[1] *Merry England* was a magazine (edited by my father) he had known in Manchester, and noted especially during his Christmas holiday at home. His uncle, Edward Healy Thompson, was already one of the contributors, and others were Cardinal Manning, Lionel Johnson, Hilaire Belloc, St John Adcock, Sir William Butler, Coulson Kernahan, Coventry Patmore, W. H. Hudson, Katharine Tynan, J. G. Snead-Cox, Aubrey de Vere, and Wilfrid Scawen Blunt.

on the principle of 'Yet will I try the last,' I have added a few specimens of it, with the off chance that one may be less poor than the rest. Apologising very sincerely for any intrusion on your valuable time, I remain yours with little hope,

FRANCIS THOMPSON.

Kindly address your rejection to the Charing Cross Post Office."

Francis had more than remembered the existence of the magazine and its editor. "I was myself virtually his pupil and his wife's long before I knew him. He has in my opinion—an opinion of long standing—done more than any man in these latter days to educate Catholic literary opinion," he wrote to Manchester soon after his first appearance in the magazine. He knew the target at which he aimed.

In "Paganism Old and New" we have the beauty of the circumstances of Pagan life, its processional maidens, "shaking a most divine dance from their feet," its theatres unroofed to the smokeless sky. With these, he says, the advocates of a revived Paganism contrast the conditions of to-day: "the cold formalities of an outworn worship; our *ne plus ultra* of pageantry, a Lord Mayor's show; the dryadless woods regarded chiefly as potential timber; the grimy streets, the grimy air, the disfiguring statues, the Stygian crowd; the temple to the reigning goddess Gelasma, which mocks the name of theatre; last and worst, the fatal degradation of popular perception which has gazed so long on ugliness that it takes her to its bosom. In our capitals the very heavens have lost their innocence. Aurora may rise over our cities, but she has forgotten how to

blush." From the pavement where the East sweeps the soot in eddies round his ankles, he protests: "Pagan Paganism was not poetical. No pagan eye ever visioned the nymphs of Shelley." "In the name of all the Muses, what treason against Love and Beauty!" he cries against Catullus, Propertius, and Ovid, for the arid eroticism that was satisfied to write of love without tribute to the colour of a lady's eyes. For contrast, he quotes Rossetti's—

> Her eyes were deeper than the depth
> Of waters stilled at even;

Wordsworth's "Eyes like stars of twilight fair"; Collins's Pity "with eyes of dewy light"; Shelley's "Thy sweet-child sleep, the filmy-eyed." And of the fair love of Dante and other Christian poets he makes sweet and loyal praises. He was the lover to write an essay in defence of the social order that denied him love, sleep, pity, and the eyes of any lady. It was the essay, too, of a man physically hungry. He supped full, but with fancies.

Thompson's manuscripts, most uninviting and difficult in outward aspect, were at first pigeon-holed by a preoccupied editor—were then released, read, and estimated at their worth. My father and mother (the W. M. and A. M. of following pages) decided to accept the essay and a poem, and to seek the author. To this end my father wrote a letter addressed to Charing Cross Post Office, stating the intention of printing some of the manuscript, and asking the author to call for a proof and to discuss the chances of future work. To that letter

came no reply and publication was postponed. Then his letter was returned through the Dead-Letter Office, and the editor decided to print "The Passion of Mary" as a possible way of getting into communication with the author. The poem appeared in *Merry England* for April 1888, and on the 14th my father received the following letter:—

"*April 14th*, 1888.—Dear Sir,—In the last days of February or the first days of March, 1887 (my memory fails me as to the exact date), I forwarded to you for your magazine a prose article, 'Paganism Old and New' (or 'Ancient and Modern,' for I forget which wording I adopted), and accompanied it by some pieces of verse, on the chance that if the prose failed, some of the verse might meet acceptance. I enclosed a stamped envelope for a reply, since (as I said) I did not desire the return of the manuscript. Imprudently, perhaps, instead of forwarding the parcel through the post, I dropped it with my own hand into the letter-box of 43 Essex Street. There was consequently no stamp on it, since I did not think a stamp would be necessary under the circumstances. I asked you to address your answer to the Charing Cross Post Office. To be brief, from that day to this, no answer has ever come into my hands. And yet, more than a twelvemonth since the forwarding of the manuscript, I am now informed that one of the copies of verse which I submitted to you (*i.e.*, 'The Passion of Mary') is appearing in this month's issue of *Merry England*. Such an occurrence I can only explain to myself in one way, viz., that some untoward accident cut off your means of communicating with me. To suppose otherwise—to suppose it intentional—would be to wrong your known honour and courtesy. I have no doubt that your explanation, when I receive it, will be entirely satisfactory to me. I therefore enclose a stamped and addressed envelope for an answer, hoping that you will recompense me for my long delay by the favour

of an early reply. In any case, however long circumstances may possibly delay your reply, it will be sure of reaching me at the address I have now given.—I remain, yours faithfully,

FRANCIS JOSEPH THOMPSON.

"*P.S.*—Doubtless, when I received no answer, I ought to have written again. My excuse must be that a flood-tide of misfortune rolled over me, leaving me no leisure to occupy myself with what I regarded as an attempt that had hopelessly failed. Hence my entire subsequent silence."

To this my father answered with an explanation and a repetition of his invitation to Francis to arrange for regular work, and despatched his answer by a special messenger to the address given, a chemist's shop in Drury Lane. The chemist's manner of accepting responsibility for the safe delivery of the letter was discouraging. He said that Thompson sometimes called for letters, but that he knew little of him. After a few days during which nothing was heard my father went himself in search. His obvious eagerness prompted a query from the man behind the counter: "Are you a relative? he owes me three-and-ninepence." With that paid and a promise of ten-and-sixpence if he produced the poet, he agreed to do his best, and, many days after, my father, being in his study, was told that Mr. Thompson wished to see him. "Show him up," he said, and was left alone.

Then the door opened, and the stranger came half in. The door closed, but he had not entered. Again it opened, again it shut. At the third attempt a waif of a man came in. No such figure had been looked for; ragged and unkempt, with no shirt beneath his coat and bare feet in broken shoes, he stood in silence.

" You must have had access to many books when you wrote that essay," was what my father mustered up by way of an opening. " That," said Thompson, his shyness at once replaced by an acerbity that afterwards became one of the most familiar of his never-to-be-resented mannerisms, " that is precisely where the essay fails. I had no books by me at the time save Aeschylus and Blake." There was little to be done for him at that interview save the pressing of a fee upon him and the extraction of a promise to call again. He made none of the confidences characteristic of a man seeking sympathy and alms. He was secretive and with no eagerness for plans for his benefit, and he refused the offer of a small weekly sum that would enable him to sleep in a bed and sit at a table. I know of no man, and can imagine none, to whom another can so easily unburden himself of uneasiness and formalities as to my father. To him the poor and the rich are, as the fishes and the flames to St Francis, his brothers and his friends at sight, even if these are shy as fishes and sightless as flame. But the impression of the visit on my father was of a meeting that did not end in great usefulness—so much was indicated by a manner schooled in concealments. But Francis came again, and again, and of the falsity of the impression given by his manner, his poetry in the address to his host's little girl is the proof:—

> Yet is there more, whereat none guesseth, love !
> Upon the ending of my deadly night
> (Whereof thou hast not the surmise, and slight
> Is all that any mortal knows thereof),
> Thou wert to me that earnest of day's light,

The Discovery

When, like the back of a gold-mailèd saurian
Heaving its slow length from Nilotic slime,
The first long gleaming fissure runs Aurorian
Athwart the yet dun firmament of prime.
Stretched on the margin of the cruel sea
Whence they had rescued me,
With faint and painful pulses was I lying;
Not yet discerning well
If I had 'scaped, or were an icicle,
Whose thawing is its dying.
Like one who sweats before a despot's gate,
Summoned by some presaging scroll of fate,
And knows not whether kiss or dagger wait;
And all so sickened is his countenance,
The courtiers buzz, " Lo, doomed !" and look at him askance:
At fate's dread portal then
Even so stood I, I ken,
Even so stood I, between a joy and fear,
And said to mine own heart, " Now if the end be here !"

In the last four lines is probably an instance of his habitual appropriation of things seen for his poetic images. If the door of my father's room is here promoted to a part in *Sister Songs*, it takes its place with the clock of Covent Garden, the arrowy minute-hand of which Shane Leslie has remarked as suggesting Thompson's description of himself when he

Stood bound and helplessly
For Time to shoot his barbèd minutes at me.

In the continuation of the same passage is found another example:—

Suffered the trampling hoof of every hour
In night's slow-wheelèd car;
Until the tardy dawn dragged me at length
From under those dread wheels; and, bled of strength,
I waited the inevitable last.

He Hesitates

Even before he was knocked down by a cab, as happened to him later, the heavy traffic of Covent Garden, harassing the straggler in the gutter, may well have been to him a type of danger and fears.

The idea of rescue came slowly and doubtfully to Francis, who was far less ready than my father to believe that he was fitted for the writing career. Their first talks were of books; of his history he said nothing. He was willing to tell of the poets he had read in the Guildhall Library, until the police, being, as he said, against him, barred the entrance, so ill-dressed and unkempt was he. He was willing, too, that anything he had written should be published, and bring temporary wealth; but reluctant to admit that he might become a worker and quit the streets—so fixedly reluctant that some strong reason was conjectured. He would visit my father, then living in Kensington, but it was long before he would accept substantial hospitalities; coming in the evening or afternoon, he would leave to return to his calling—literally a calling—of cabs. That he was also during this time either parting from, or searching for, his Ann is not unlikely. He took his reprieve as he had taken his doom; he went frightened and brave at once. With his hesitations, it was more than six months later that he wrote anew for *Merry England*, when appeared "Bunyan in the Light of Modern Criticism"; his three previous appearances, in April, May, and June, with "The Passion of Mary;" "Dream Tryst," and "Paganism Old and New," having exhausted the possible things among those first submitted. The intention declared in an early number

of my father's magazine was to give voice to a renascence of happiness: "We shall try to revive in our own hearts, and in the hearts of others, the enthusiasm of the Christian Faith." This enthusiasm was to inform essays on social problems and essays in literary and artistic criticism, and an optimistic editor had told his contributors "to recover the humour, and good humour, of the Saints and Fathers." "Paganism Old and New," in which it was sought to expose the fallacy of searching for love of beauty and sweetness in the pagan mythology, and to reveal the essential modernity, and even Christianity, of Keats' and Shelley's pagan beauties, was a triumph of journalistic obedience and appropriateness.

The streets, somehow, had nurtured a poet and trained a journalist. He had gone down into poverty so absolute that he was often without pen and paper, and now emerged a pressman. Not his happiness, nor his tenderness, nor his sensibility had been marred, like his constitution, by his experiences. To be the target of such pains as it is the habit of the world to deplore as the extreme of disaster, and yet to keep alive the young flame of his poetry; to be under compulsion to watch the ignominies of the town, and yet never to be nor to think himself ignominious; to establish the certitude of his virtue; to keep flourishing an infinite tenderness and capability for delicacies and *gentilezze* of love—these were the triumphs of his immunity. Thompson's muse rose from the penal waters fresh as Botticelli's Venus. It had not been more marvellous if Sandro's lady, with dry curls, had risen from a real unplumbed, salt, estranging sea, instead of from the silly ripples of Florentine convention.

He Renounces Opium

But physically he was battered; and his condition led my father to prevail upon him, with much difficulty, to be examined by a doctor. "He will not live," was the first verdict, "and you hasten his death by denying his whims and opium." But the risk was taken, and Francis went to a private hospital. Thus he alludes to the change within himself: "Please accept my warmest thanks for all your kindness and trouble on my behalf. I know this is a very perfunctory-looking letter; but until the first sharp struggle is over, it is difficult for me to write in any other way."

The renunciation of opium, not its indulgence, opened the doors of the intellect. Opium killed the poet in Coleridge; the opium habit was stifled at the birth of the poet in Thompson. His images came toppling about his thoughts overflowingly during the pains of abstinence. This, too, was de Quincey's experience, told when he was unwinding "the accursed chain": "I protest to you I have a greater influx of thoughts in one hour at present than in a whole year under the reign of opium."

"The Ode to the Setting Sun" was written at midsummer in 1889, and on receiving it, his editor, with my mother and a young friend, Vernon Blackburn, straightway took the train to congratulate him on this first conclusive sign of the splendour of his powers. For the poet had been placed with the monks at Storrington Priory, and it was the music of three wandering musicians heard in the village street that opened the ode[1]:—

[1] He himself notes the circumstances of composition. "Mem. —'Ode to Setting Sun' begun in the field of the Cross, and under shadow of the Cross, at sunset; finished ascending and descending Jacob's Ladder (mid or late noon?)." "The Song of the Hours" also was written at Storrington.

The wailful sweetness of the violin
Floats down the hushèd waters of the wind,
The heart-strings of the throbbing harp begin
To long in aching music. . . .

Thus by accident were the words of Sir Thomas Browne, an author beloved of Francis, again made good: "And even that tavern music, which makes one merry, another mad, in me strikes a deep fit of devotion." After requests for boots and writing-pads—walking and writing made up his days—he gives notice that with many misgivings he has fixed on Shelley for the theme of a first *Dublin Review* article:—

"I have done so principally because I remember more of him than of any other poet (though that is saying little). Coleridge was always my favourite poet; but I early recognised that to make him a model was like trying to run up a window-pane, or to make clotted cream out of moonlight, or to pack jelly-fish in hampers. So that until I was twenty-two Shelley was more studied by me than anyone else. At the same time I am exposed to the danger of talking platitudes, because so much has been written about Shelley of late years which I have never read. With regard to what you say about the advantage of my being in a more booky place than Storrington[1] I entirely agree. Nor need you fear the opium. I have learned the advantage of being without it for mental exercise; and (still more important) I have learned to bear my fits of depression without it. Personally I no longer fear it."

Of this article nearly the whole history is told in a long letter written at intervals to an old friend, Canon

[1] The Shelley Essay bears signs of the booklessness of Storrington. All the quotations were made from memory, and nearly all were inaccurate.

(afterwards Bishop) Carroll, to whom Francis found it easier to report than directly to his family:—

" The article on Shelley which you asked about I finished at last, with quite agonising pain and elaboration. It might have been written in tears, and is proportionately dear to me. I fear, however, that it will not be accepted, or accepted only with such modifications as will go to my heart. It has not been inserted in the current issue of the *Dublin*—a fact which looks ominous. First, you see, I prefaced it by a fiery attack on Catholic Philistinism, driven home with all the rhetoric which I could muster. That is pretty sure to be a stumbling-block. I consulted Mr. Meynell as to its suppression, but he said ' Leave it in.' I suspect that he thoroughly agrees with it. Secondly, it is written at an almost incessant level of poetic prose, and seethes with imagery like my poetry itself. Now the sober, ponderous, ecclesiastical *Dublin* confronted with poetic prose must be considerably scared. The editor probably cannot make up his mind whether it is heavenly rhetoric or infernal nonsense.

" There can now be no doubt that the *Dublin Review* has rejected my article. Nothing has been heard of it since it was sent. I only hope that they have not lost the MS. That would be to lose the picked fruit of three painful months—a quite irreparable loss. I am not surprised, myself. What is an unlucky ecclesiastical editor to do when confronted with something so *sui generis* as is my friend's favourite passage, and the only one which I can remember. I had been talking of the 'Cloud,' and remarking that it displayed ' the childish faculty of make-believe, raised to the n^{th} power.' In fact, I said, Shelley was the child, still at play, though his play-things were larger. Then I burst into prose poetry: ' The universe is his box of toys. He dabbles his hands in the sunset. He is gold-dusty with tumbling amid the stars. He makes bright mischief with the moon. He teases into growling the kennelled thunder, and laughs at the shaking of its fiery

chain. He dances in and out of the gates of heaven. He runs wild over the fields of ether. He chases the rolling world. He gets between the feet of the horses of the sun. He stands in the lap of patient Nature, and twines her loosened tresses after a hundred wilful fashions, to see how she will look nicest in his poetry.' The editor sees at once that here is something such as he has never encountered before. Personally, I recollect nothing like it in English prose. In French prose I could point to something not so dissimilar—in Victor Hugo. But not in English. De Quincey is as boldly poetical, and his strain far higher; but he is poetical after quite another style. The editor feels himself out of his latitude. He is probably a person of only average literary taste—that is, he can tell the literary hawk from the literary handsaw when the wind is southerly. He feels that discretion is the better part of valour. The thing may be very good, may be very bad. But it is beyond or below comprehension. So he rejects it. Twelve years hence (if he live so long) he will feel uncomfortable should anyone allude to that rejection. Unless he has lost the MS. In that case the thing is gone for ever."

What little more remains to be told of the writing and the posthumous publication of the Shelley article comes from W. M.:—

" It happened that Bishop (afterwards Cardinal) Vaughan, who knew the poet's family well in Lancashire, and had known Francis himself at Ushaw, met him in London at our house, and out of this meeting and the Bishop's wish to serve him, came the suggestion that he should contribute a paper to the *Dublin Review*. That venerable quarterly, founded by Cardinal Wiseman half a century before, Bishop Vaughan now owned but did not edit. It inherited ecclesiastical rather than literary traditions; and a due consideration for these dictated the opening passages of the Essay, since somewhat curtailed. Hence proceeded the plea that Theology and Literature might be reconciled—just such

another reconciliation as Art had been adjured to seal with Nature at the end of the eighteenth century:

Go find her, kiss her, and be friends again!

And Thompson's plea had this added relevance—that the choice of a subject, left to himself, had fallen upon Shelley; perhaps a dubious choice. At any rate the article was returned to him from the *Dublin*—one more of those memorable rejections that go into the treasury of all neglected writers' consolations, perhaps their illusions. Thrown aside by its discouraged author, the Essay was found among his papers after his death. His literary executor thought it right that the Review for which it was originally designed should again have the offer of it, since a new generation of readers had arisen, and another editor, in days otherwise regenerate. Thus it happened that this orphan among Essays entered at last on a full inheritance of fame."

So it appeared in the *Dublin* dated July 1908, and for the first time in a long life of seventy-two years the Review passed into a second edition. Its reissue in separate form has for preface George Wyndham's estimate of it as the most important contribution that had been made to English literature for twenty years.

Still at Storrington, he wrote to W. M.:—

"How good and kind and patient you are with me! far more than I am with myself, for I am often sick with the being that inhabits this villainous mud-hut of a body. . . . I beguiled four ill nights, while the mental cloud was somewhat lifted, by writing the verses I herewith send you. If there be no saving grace of poetry in them they are damned; for I am painfully conscious that they display me, in every respect, at my morally weakest. Indeed no one but yourself—or, to be more accurate, yourselves—would

I have allowed to see them; for often verse written as I write it is nothing less than a confessional far more intimate than the sacerdotal one. *That* touches only your sins, and leaves in merciful darkness your ignominious, if sinless, weaknesses. When the soul goes forth, like Andersen's Emperor, thinking herself clothed round with singing-robes, while in reality her naked weakness is given defenceless to the visiting wind, not every mother's son would you allow to gaze on you at such a time. The fact is my nerves want taking up like an Atlantic cable, and recasing. I am sometimes like a dispossessed hermit crab, looking about everywhere for a new shell, and quivering at every touch. Figuratively speaking, if I prick my finger I seem to feel it with my whole body."

In February 1890, having bidden good-bye at Storrington to Daisy " and Daisy's sister-blossom or blossom-sister, Violet (there were nine children in that family, the last four all flowers—Rose, Daisy, Lily, and Violet)," he returned to London. In town the poetry was continued. " Love in Dian's Lap " was written as he paced the Library floor at Palace Court; and in Kensington Gardens, where I have seen him at prayer as well as at poetry, he composed " Sister Songs." Both were pencilled into penny exercise-books. His reiterated " It's a penny exercise-book " is remembered by every member of the household set to search for the mislaid first drafts of " Love in Dian's Lap "—he himself too dismayed to look.

In this form " Sister Songs " (written at about the time of " The Hound of Heaven," in 1891, but not published till 1895) was covertly handed as a Christmas offering to his friends, or rather left with a note where it would be seen by them:—

A Christmas Present

" Dear Mr. Meynell,—I leave with this on the mantelpiece (in an exercise-book) the poem of which I spoke. If intensity of labour could make it good, good it would be. One way or the other, it will be an effectual test of a theme on which I have never yet written; if from it I have failed to draw poetry, then I may as well take down my sign.—Always yours,

Francis Thompson."

Later, having recovered the manuscript to add to it the " Inscription," he returned it with:—

" Before I talk of anything else, let me thank you *ab imis medullis* for the one happy Christmas I have had for many a year. Herewith I send you my laggard poem. I have been delayed partly through making some minor corrections, but chiefly through having to transcribe the ' Inscription ' at the close of it."

He had watched the piling up of family presents before making his own, and in the " Inscription " he tells:—

But one I marked who lingered still behind,
As for such souls no seemly gift had he:
    He was not of their strain,
Nor worthy so bright beings to entertain,
Nor fit compeer for such high company;
Yet was he surely born to them in mind,
Their youngest nursling of the spirit's kind.
    Last stole this one,
With timid glance, of watching eyes adread,
And dropped his frightened flower when all were gone;
And where the frail flower fell, it witherèd.
But yet methought those high souls smiled thereon;
As when a child, upstraining at your knees
Some fond and fancied nothings, says, " I give you these.'

Of the first notion for this poem's title, "Amphicypellon," he wrote:—

"It refers to the αμφικυπελλον which Hephaestus, in Homer, bears round to the gods when he acts as cup-bearer by way of joke. When Schliemann's things from Troy were first exhibited at South Kensington, I remember seeing among them a drinking-cup labelled 'Perhaps the *amphicypellon* of Homer.' It was a boat-shaped cup of plain gold, open at the top and with a crescentic aperture at either extremity of the rim, through which the wine could either be poured or drunk. So that you could pour from either end, and (if the cup were *brimmed* with wine) two people could have drunk from it at the same time, one at either extremity. In a certain sense, therefore, it was a double cup. And it had also two handles, one at either of its boat-shaped sides, so that it was a two-handled cup. You will see at once why I have applied the name to my double poem."

Later this title was abandoned:—

"Let it be 'Sister Songs' as you suggest. But keep 'an offering to two sisters' where it now is—on the title page. 'Sister Songs' was my own first alteration of the title, but was dropped I hardly know why."

One of his first articles after he left his always beloved Storrington was the notice of General Booth's *In Darkest England*. Called "Catholics in Darkest England," and signed "Francis Tancred," it appeared in *Merry England* for January 1891. "Francis Tancred" received from Mr. Stead the following letter:—

"Dear Sir,—I beg to forward you herewith a copy of the *Review of Reviews*, in which you will find your admirable

article quoted and briefly commented upon. Permit me to say that I read your article with sincere admiration and heartfelt sympathy, and that it delighted the Salvation Army people at headquarters more than anything that has appeared for a long time. 'That man can write,' said Bramwell Booth to me, and I think he sincerely grudges your pen to the Catholic Church.—I am, yours truly,

W. T. STEAD."

Cardinal Manning thereupon summoned Francis through my father, who was the Cardinal's friend, and to this single meeting Francis alludes in "To the Dead Cardinal of Westminster," a poem written, when, a year later, 1892, Manning died. Of this A. M. has said:—

"In 1892 his editor asked him for a poem on Cardinal Manning, just dead, whom the poet had once visited; surely never was a poem 'to order' so greatly and originally inspired. I have alluded to days of deep depression in Francis Thompson's life, and they occurred now and then, with fairly cheerful intervals, at this time. It was in the grief and terror of such a day that he wrote 'To the Dead Cardinal of Westminster,' which is a poem rather on himself than on the dead, an all but despairing presage of his own decease, which, when sixteen years later it came, brought no despair."

Claiming the ear of the dead, because the Cardinal asked the poet to go often to him, he writes in a first version of the poem:—

I saw thee only once,
Although thy gentle tones
Said soft:—
"Come hither oft."

The Discovery

Therefore my spirit clings
Heaven's porter by the wings,
And holds
Its gated golds

Apart, with thee to press
A private business;
Whence
Deign me audience.

Your singer did not come
Back to that stern, bare home:[1]
He knew
Himself and you.

I saw, as seers do,
That you were even you;
And—why,
I too was I.

In that, as in " The Fallen Yew,"—

" I take you to my inmost heart, my true !"
Ah fool ! but there is one heart you
Shall never take him to !—

his theme is one that often pressed home upon him:—

" There is such goodwill to impart, and such goodwil to receive, that each threatens to become the other, but the law of individuality collects its secret strength; you are you and I am I, and so we remain."

These concluding words are transcribed with a suppressed verse of " To the Dead Cardinal of Westminster "—a verse suppressed, I imagine, because its

[1] The old Archbishop's House in Carlisle Place.

poetry was not approved rather than because it committed its author to a too definite theory of Individualism. While he marks the impenetrability of mind and mind, he writes hotly nevertheless of the Political Economist's Individualism:—

"For diabolical this doctrine of Individualism is; it is the outcome of the proud teaching which declares it despicable for men to bow before their fellow-men. It has meant, not that a man should be individual, but that he should be independent. Now this I take to be an altogether deadly lie. A man *should* be individual, but not independent. The very laws of Nature forbid independence. . . . Independent, he puts forth no influence; he is sterile as the sands of the desert. For it is little less than an immutable ordinance throughout the universe that without intercommunion nothing is generated. The plant may reproduce on itself, but if you would rise above mere vegetation, or the lowest forms of animal life, there can be no true hermaphroditism; aye, even in the realm of Mind, 'male and female created he them.' There is but one thing you can do for yourself; you can kill yourself. Though you may try to live for yourself, you cannot, in any permanence, live by yourself. You may rot by yourself, if you will; but that is not doing, it is ceasing."

Afterwards he was to learn even more strictly from Patmore that the unit of the world has two persons.

As in the realm of Mind, so in the Spiritual. What might seem the culmination of secret Individualism, the Communion between Christ and the Soul, is made universal in the Open Court of Catholicism. However strict the segregation of Francis's spiritual experiences, they were, save in some rare and awful moments of estrangement, offered to Christ, through Christ to the

Church, through the Church to the men from whose intercourse he found himself debarred. Tolstoy's " every man in the depths of his soul has something he alone comprehends, namely, his attitude towards God " is a thought divinely expressed in " The Fallen Yew," but it is only one aspect of the truth, as the single reflection in a looking-glass is but a single aspect of the thing before it. Second thoughts, like second mirrors, encircle and multiply the first impression.

CHAPTER VI

LITERARY BEGINNINGS

THE discovery that a man cannot, with any permanence, live by himself was made after his experience in London and at Storrington. He had returned to my father's neighbourhood resolved, not only to be a poet, but to meet the social labours of journalism. This, the elbowing with other workers at a close-packed table in the private room where, every Thursday, my father produced with superhuman effort a fresh number of his *Weekly Register*, meant, much more than a visit to a Cardinal, a return to the humanities. He fell, with much talk, right into the thick of it. He was put to small tasks as much that he might be put out of train for talk as for the use he was. But no device was good enough to do that; set him to write and there would be endless conversation on nibs and paper, of what was advisable to write, what to ignore, of his readers' alleged susceptibilities, and his care for the paper's circulation. In the end after a hard day there might, or might not, be a "par" to show, or some doggerel not to show.

And writing
And inditing
And exciting
And biting
My pencil, inviting
Inspiration and plighting

My hair into elf-locks most wild, and affrighting,
And *Registering*, and daying and nighting;
Our readers
Delighting
With leaders
That Whiteing
Might envy before he found work more requiting.

The instant demands of the " busy day " he never learnt to supply, nor was he put at all seriously to the task of learning. He was too tedious a pupil for hurried masters. On one busy day, when his platitudes had been so long chanted that they had got written into the manuscripts of his distracted audience, he was put in charge of a visitor who could match all commonplaces with tumultuously brilliant talk. But it was Thompson's day. With numbers on his side—his repetitions came in hordes fit to annihilate opposition—he plodded through a long afternoon in another room with the silent saviour of the workers. To the dinner table he came with the bright eye of enthusiasm; " I have never known G—— more brilliant," he explained in all honesty.

At times he would be sent for short visits to Crawley, where the friendly Capuchin Fathers were, whence he writes to W. M.:—

" Now that I feel on my feet again, I am longing to be back amongst you all. Touchstone, with the slightest alteration, voices my feelings about country life: ' Now in respect it is in the fields, it pleaseth me well; but in respect it is not in the city, it is tedious.' I hope, nevertheless, that before the season gets too late you will yourself make your escape. I know how ill you were before I left; and it is disgusting to think that here am I, like the fat reed that

rots itself in ease on Lethe wharf, while you are hung up body and soul. The *Register* gave me a 'turn,' by the way, last week. My eyes strayed carelessly across the announcements of deaths, and suddenly saw—'Monica Mary.' My heart stood still, I think. Of course the next second I knew it must be some other Monica Mary, not she who walks among the poppies—and the restaurants. How, unwell as you must be, you have managed to make such good work of the *Register* and of *Merry England* I don't understand. *M. E.*, in particular, is an excellent number. There is not a poor article in it—except my own, which is dull enough to please a bishop."

Or, like as not, instead of to the country, he would be sent forth on some expedition with the children to whom he bore himself as a sweet and eager, though not from their point of view an exciting, companion. He would concentrate on companionable things, and we have him writing to my father like the gravest sportsman and intentest child of skating in Kensington Gardens in the winter of 1891:—

"The discovery of what I have done to my own skates leads me to ask you to warn Monica. If she wishes to preserve her skates, do not let her climb in them the bank of the Round Pond, where it is set with stones. Indeed, she ought not to go on the bank in her skates at all; it is most destructive to them. . . . Monica can already skate backwards a little—I can't. She can do the outside edge a little—I can't. It is true that her mode of terminating the latter stroke is to sit down rapidly on the ice; but this is a mere mannerism which, as she advances in her art, she will doubtless prune in favour of a severer style; but all youthful artists have their little luxuriances. Let me thank you for your kindness in trusting the children to me. Or shall I say trusting me to them? For on reflection, I have a haunt-

ing suspicion that Monica managed the party with the same energy she devotes to her skating. Do not infer hence that she tyrannised over me. On the contrary, both she and Cuckoo were most solicitously anxious lest I should mar my own pleasure in attending to theirs. A needless anxiety, since I desired nothing better than to play with them."

In 1891, at the birth of my brother Francis, he wrote to W. M.:—

"I hardly, I fear, gave you even commonplace thanks for the favour you conferred on me in choosing me for your little son's godfather. Even now I am utterly unable to express to you what I feel regarding it; I can only hope that you may comprehend without words. As for the quietness with which I took it on Saturday—for the premeditated of emotion in speech I have an instinctive horror which, I think, you share sufficiently to understand and excuse in me. Besides, the words which one might use have been desiccated, fossilised, by those amiable persons who not only use the heart as a sleeve-ornament, but conspicuously label it—'This is a Heart.' One can only, like Cordelia, speak by silence.

"Give my love to Monicella, and Cuckoo, and all the children. As for F. M. M., I doubt the primitive egoism is still too new in him for him to care a baby-rattle about my love."

That he came with "copy" for the press a day late—Friday instead of Thursday—was characteristic; that he then further delayed it by accident more so, but most characteristic of all was his regret, expressed in such notes as these to W. M.:—

"I called at Palace Court on Friday, and, finding you were gone, started to follow you. Unfortunately I fell into

composition on the way, and when I next became conscious of matters sublunary, found myself wandering about somewhere in the region of Smithfield Market, and the time late in the afternoon. I am heartily sorry for my failure to keep my appointment, and hope you will forgive me. I thought I had disciplined myself out of these aberrations, which makes me feel all the more vexed about the matter."

And, still more distressed:—

"I don't know what I shall do, or what you shall do. I haven't been able to write a line. I am more in a condition to sit down and go into hysterics like a girl than to write anything. I know how vexed and impatient you must feel to hear this from me, when you had expected to have the thing from me this morning. Indeed I feel that you have already done too much for me; and that it would be better you should have nothing more to do with me. You have already displayed a patience and tenderness with me that my kindred would never have displayed; and it is most unjust that I should any longer be a burden to you. I think I am fit for nothing: certainly not fit to be any longer the object of your too great kindness. Please understand that I entirely feel, and am perfectly resigned to the ending of an experiment which even your sweetness would never have burdened yourself with, if you could have foreseen the consequences.

F. T."

With such fits my father dealt with a persuasiveness and love that I think no other man could have summoned.[1]

[1] In after years Francis wrote letters that seemed to supply no possible opening for the comforter. Read to-day, their desperation offers no outlet but a return to the streets. But no sooner did he come into my father's presence, than he was consoled, often without the exchange of a word.

At Friston, in Suffolk,

> Summer set lip to earth's bosom bare,
> And left the flushed print in a poppy there.

At Friston he was given the poppy and wrote the poem. I remember him as measuring himself, on the borders of a marsh, against a thistle, the fellow to that which stands six foot out of Sussex turf in " Daisy "; I see him with the poplars on the marshes, and associate him with a picnic on the Broads among pine-cones and herons. I think it is he I see coming in at the farm-gate dusty from a road still bright in the dusk. But the recollections are elusive. His place in children memories is not defined, like that of Brin, the friend who hit a ball over the farm roof, of the chicken pecking at the dining-room floor, a sister's first steps, the boy who twisted the cows' tails as he drove the cattle up from the pastures at night; and better remembered is the hard old man who, stooping over his work in the vegetable garden, suddenly rose up and threw a stone as big as a potato at a truant boy. The boy and man, the cry of the one and the grunted curses of the other, and their remorseless manner of settling again to work, were things for a London child to marvel at. But the poet, himself as gentle as children, is remembered, and remembered vaguely, as part of the general gentle world. Others are remembered for competence, for large authority, the freedom of their coming and going, their businesses, affluence, dreariness, or laughter; they are the substantial people, more substantial than the people of to-day.

There is more of Friston and the Monica of " The Poppy " in later verses:—

In the land of flag-lilies,
Where burst in golden clangours
The joy-bells of the broom,
You were full of willy-nillies,
Pets, and bee-like angers:
Flaming like a dusky poppy,
In a wrathful bloom.

. . . . . .

Yellow were the wheat-ways,
The poppies were most red;
And all your meet and feat ways,
Your sudden bee-like snarlings,
Ah, do you remember,
Darling of the darlings ?

. . . . . .

Now at one, and now at two,
Swift to pout and swift to woo,
The maid I knew:
Still I see the duskèd tresses—
But the old angers, old caresses ?
Still your eyes are autumn thunders,
But where are *you*, child, you ?

My father, before the idea of a published volume had taken shape, sewed up into booklets a few copies of " The Poppy " and the poems already printed in *Merry England*. One copy was sent by a common friend to Tennyson, who said: " Thanks for letting us see the vigorous poems," and no more.

Browning, on the other hand, who was a visitor at Palace Court and on whose ready sympathy for personal details my father could rely, wrote at generous length:—

"Asolo, Veneto, Italia, *Oct.* 7, '89.

"Dear Mr. Meynell,—I hardly know how to apologise to you, or explain to myself, how there has occurred such a delay in doing what I had an impulse to do as soon as I read the very interesting papers written by Mr. Thompson, and so kindly brought under my notice by yourself. Both the Verse and Prose are indeed remarkable—even without the particulars concerning their author, for which I am indebted to your goodness. It is altogether extraordinary that a young man so naturally gifted should need incitement to do justice to his own conspicuous ability by endeavouring to emerge from so uncongenial a course of life as that which you describe. Surely the least remunerating sort of 'literary life' would offer advantages incompatible with the hardest of all struggles for existence, such as I take Mr. Thompson's to be. Pray assure him, if he cares to know it, that I have a confident expectation of his success, if he will but extricate himself—as by a strenuous effort he may—from all that must now embarrass him terribly. He can have no better friend and adviser than yourself—except *himself*, if he listens to the inner voice.

"Pray offer my best thanks to Mrs. Meynell for her remembrance of me—who am, as she desires, profiting by the quiet and beauty of this place—whence, however, I shall soon depart for Venice, on my way homeward.[1] I gather, from the absence of anything to the contrary in your letter, that all is well with you—and so may it continue! I do not forget your old kindliness, though we are so much apart in London; and you must account me always, dear Mr. Meynell, as yours cordially,

Robert Browning."

F. T. to W. M.:—

"I have received Mr. Sharp's new *Life of Browning*, which reminds me to do what I have been intending to

[1] "*Homeward*"; Browning left Asolo at the end of October, to die in Venice early in December.

do for a long time past; but whenever I wrote to you, my mind was always occupied with something else which put the subject out of my head. I had better do it now, for even my unready pen will say better what I wish to say than would my still more unready tongue. It is simply that I wanted to tell you how deeply I was moved by the reading of Browning's letter. The idea that in the closing days of his life my writings should have been under his eye, and he should have sent me praise and encouragement, is one that I shall treasure to the closing days of *my* life. To say that I owe this to you is to say little. I have already told you that long before I had seen you, you exercised, unknown to myself, the most decisive influence over my mental development when without such an influence my mental development was like to have utterly failed. And so to you I owe not merely Browning's notice, but also that ever I should have been worth his notice. The little flowers you sent him were sprung from your own seed. I only hope that the time may not be far distant when better and less scanty flowers may repay the pains, and patience, and tenderness of your gardening."

Francis's own chronicle of the period is found in another letter to Canon Carroll:—

"A.D. 1890. Finished *August* 12. Begun, Heaven knows when. [May 1890.]

"I have been for months in a condition of acute mental misery, frequently almost akin to mania, stifling the production of everything except poetry, and rendering me quite incapable of sane letter-writing. It has ended in my return to London; for the removal of the opium had quite destroyed my power of bearing the almost unbroken solitude in which I found myself. No doubt you saw in the famous January *Merry England* Browning's letter about me. It is, I see, alluded to in Mr. Sharp's *Life*. Sharp's book has been remarkably successful, no doubt because it has come out just during the Browning boom, and has no rival. As

for the verses published in this month's *Merry England*, Mr. Meynell told me himself that he did not care particularly for them, because they were too like a poem of Mrs. Browning's. (You will find the poem—a poem on Pan making a pipe out of a reed—where it first appeared, namely, in one of your two old volumes of the *Cornhill Magazine*. There I read it; and it is a great favourite of mine. The last two stanzas, with their sudden deeply pathetic turn of thought, are most felicitous, I think.) The verses on Father Perry[1] in last month's *Merry England* were the first verses of mine that attracted any praise from Catholic outsiders. . . . As for the 'Song of the Hours,' to which you referred, Mr. Meynell was greatly pleased with it; but considered that while it avoided the violence of diction which deformed the 'Ode,'[2] it was not equal to that in range of power.

. . . . . .

"Since I wrote the foregoing pages a considerable time has elapsed. How long, I do not know, for they were written at intervals, and so were not dated. My health has been consistently bad; though I have had, and have, nothing definite the matter with me, except dyspepsia and constant colds. My writing powers have deserted me, and I have suffered failure after failure. Much, no doubt, is due to this infernal weather. Confined to the house and deprived of sunlight, I droop like a moulting canary. The lines on Father Perry have taken hold of *Merry England* readers as nothing else of mine has done. I meant the thing merely for a pretty, gracefully turned fancy; what the Elizabethans would have called an excellent conceit. That it is nothing more, I quite agree with Mr. Vernon Blackburn,[3] whose judgement I much value. In the first place he generally represents Mrs. Meynell's judgement, who is his guide and friend in everything—and such a guide and friend no other young man in England has. In the second place he has an excellent judgement of his own. Of Mr. Meynell's

[1] "A Dead Astronomer." [2] "To the Setting Sun."

[3] Later to become known as one of Henley's "young men," and the music-critic of the *Pall Mall Gazette*.

opinion, I know merely that he dropped me a post-card saying the poem was ' very fine.'

" Another very small poem on Shelley, Mrs. Meynell has pronounced ' a little masterpiece.' The expression, however, may have been hastily and inaccurately reported by Mrs. Blackburn;[1] I prefer to take it with caution. Another poem, a sonnet, I have heard nothing about; but I have never yet really succeeded with a sonnet. In last week's *Scots Observer* appeared an exquisite little poem[2] by Mrs. Meynell. The poem is a perfect miniature example of her most lovelily tender work; and is, like all her best, of a signal originality in its central idea no less than in its development. Most women of genius—George Eliot, Charlotte Brontë, and Mrs. Browning, who, indeed, alludes to her husband's penetration in seeing beyond ' this mask of me '—have been decidedly plain. That Mrs. Meynell is not like them you may judge from ' Her Portrait.' Nor will she attain any rapid notice like them. Her work is of that subtly delicate order which—as with Coleridge, for instance—needs to soak into men for a generation or two before it gets adequate recognition. Nevertheless it is something to have won the admiration of men like Rossetti, Ruskin, and, shall I add, the immortal Oscar Wilde ? (A witty, paradoxical writer, who, nevertheless, *meo judicio*, will do nothing permanent because he is in earnest about nothing.) Known or unknown, she cares as little as St Francis de Sales would have cared what might become of his writings."

The poems as they appeared in *Merry England* or in journals quoting *Merry England* found notable adherents. " The Making of Viola " was reprinted by Miss Katharine Tynan in 1892 in a Dublin paper, to which she contributed a London letter, and it was in that form that Mr. J. L. Garvin, to be later the poet's in-

[1] Mother of Vernon Blackburn, and a Pantasaph friend.
[2] " Veni Creator."

spiring critic and friend, first chanced upon Thompson. After reading " The Making of Viola " (" I cannot tell you," he wrote to W. M., " what I think of the angelic ingenuousness of that poem; it exercised over me an instant fascination from which I never shall escape ") he heard nothing more of Thompson till the publication of *Poems*. His welcome of that volume is quoted in another page. Letters from Mr. Garvin, written ten years later, were kept among Francis's few valued possessions. The two were to meet at Palace Court in 1894 and at many other dates.

My father had also the happiness of printing several of the poems (" Daisy," " A Song of Youth and Age " and " To my Godchild ") in his anthology, *The Child set in the Midst, by Modern Poets*, the first book in which anything of F. T.'s appeared. This was published in 1892. Thus to W. M. in his preface fell the task of writing of him as one " who has eluded fame as long as Shelley did, but cannot elude it longer. To most readers the poems will come as the revelation of a new personality in poetry, the last discovered of the Immortals."

To Pantasaph in Wales, where he lodged at the gates of the Capuchin Monastery, he went early in 1892, and wrote: " Lord, it is good for me to be here, very good. The clogged wheels in me are slowly beginning to move." His first business was the passing of *Poems* for the press. Busy over the proof sheets, he writes in answer to some suggestions of my father's as to the dedication:—

" I cannot consent to the withdrawal of *your* name. You have of course the right to refuse to accept the dedica-

tion to yourself. But in that case I have the right to withdraw the dedication altogether, as I should certainly do. I should belie the truth and my own feelings if I represented Mrs. Meynell as the sole person to whom I owe what it has been given to me to accomplish in poetry. Suffer this—the sole thing, as unfortunate necessities of exclusion would have it, which links this first, possibly this only, volume with your name—suffer this to stand. I will feel deeply hurt if you refuse me this gratification."

The proofs reached him from a hand he loved:—

"47 PALACE COURT, *July* 19, 1893.—MY DEAR FRANCIS,—I am very glad that Mr. Lane asked me to send you the first pages of the book—your poems, to which Wilfrid and I have so long looked forward. It is a great happiness to me to do so. . . . I cannot express to you how beautiful your poems are.—Always, my dear child, your affectionate

ALICE MEYNELL."

And again, in August: "Here are your wonderful poems—most wonderful and beautiful. It is a great event to me to send you these proofs."

It is almost the rule that the author on the point of publishing should flout his public:—

"As for 'immeditatably' it is in all respects the one and only right word for the line; as regards the exact shade of meaning and feeling, and as regards the rhythmical movement it gives to the line. So it must absolutely and without any question stand—woe's me for the public! But indeed, what is the public doing *dans cette galère?* I believe, it is true, the public has an odd kind of prejudice that poems are written for its benefit. It might as well suppose that when a woman loves, she bears children for its benefit; or (in the case of the poem in question) that when a man is hurt, he bleeds for its benefit."

After more sheets had been corrected and returned to Palace Court, he writes to A. M.:—

"It seems to me that they read better than I had expected—particularly the large additions to 'To a Poet Breaking Silence,' which were written at a time when I was by no means very fit for poetry. Your interest in the volume is very dear to me. I cannot say I myself feel any elation about it. I am past the time when such things brought me any elation. I have not either of your books,[1] and of course should most greatly value them. I need not say how deeply I rejoice at your success."

[1] Among the things he wrote when A. M.'s book came to hand is this of "Domus Angusta," an essay they had discussed before: "Never again meditate the suppression of your gloomy passages—it is a most false epithet for anything you could ever write. You might as well impeach of gloominess my favourite bit in 'Timon,' with the majestic melancholy of its cadence—

> My long sickness
> Of wealth and living now begins to mend,
> And nothing brings me all things.

Both that passage and yours are poignant; both are deeply sad; while yours has an added searchingness which makes it (in de Quincey's phrase) veritably 'heart-shattering'; but how can you call 'gloomy' what so nobly and resignedly faces the terror it evokes?"

CHAPTER VII

" POEMS "

IN 1893 Messrs. Elkin Mathews and John Lane published *Poems*, a square book in brown boards with gold circles and a frontispiece by Laurence Housman. The poet viewed it with pleasure, and elsewhere the praise and blame it received were both wholehearted. He wrote:—

" Many thanks for the copies. The book is indeed beautifully got up. I have to thank you for the *Chronicle* and to thank Mr. Le Gallienne for his article. Such unselfish enthusiasm in a young poet for the work of a brother poet is as rare as it is graceful."

And later:—

" I have read in the *Register* with great surprise that the first edition is exhausted. I am even more glad for my publisher's sake than for my own. The *St James's* article, as unusually appreciative as that of the *Chronicle*, I am very pleased with."

Recurring, in another letter to W. M., to Mr. Le Gallienne's *Chronicle* article, he writes from Pantasaph:—

" When the first whirl of language is over (was it not a sin of my own former prose when I waxed enthusiastic ?) he settles down to appreciation which is at the same time criticism. Will it be believed, however, that after deprecating superlatives I am actually disposed to rank myself

higher than Mr. Le Gallienne's final sentence might seem to imply? I absolutely think that my poetry is 'greater' than any work by a new poet which has appeared *since Rossetti*. Unless, indeed, the greater work to which the critic referred was Mrs. Meynell's. I frankly admit that her poetry has exquisite unclamorous qualities beside which all the fireworks of my own are much less enduring things. Otherwise, I will not vail my crest to Henley, or Robert Bridges, or even William Watson. For the rest I have nothing but warm and surprised gratitude for your untiring efforts on my behalf. I am very pleased with all the letters you have sent me, particularly Vincent O'Sullivan's from Oxford."

In a manner he was but sharing in the general welcome then accorded to the poets. Davidson was being hailed with intense zest; Norman Gale himself, singing amid applause, offered congratulations and a review to F. T. Only with the appearance of *Sister Songs* and *New Poems* was he roundly and viciously abused. But already round the standard of " An Old Fogey " (Andrew Lang), raised in the *Contemporary Review*, February 1894, *à propos* of " The Young Men," there was a considerable gathering.

Some of his friends thought such treatment salutary: Coventry Patmore to A. M., February 3, 1894: " Lang is a clever donkey. It will do F. T. nothing but good to be a little attacked." Coventry Patmore's own article in the *Fortnightly*, July 1894, was written before he and Thompson had met. It was easy for even frequent callers at Palace Court to miss F. T., since he never kept appointments. At this time A. M. wrote to him: " I have been much disappointed at not having the opportunity of introducing you to Coven-

try Patmore. He wished so much to see you. If you knew the splendid praises he crowned you with!" As a rule the critics were entirely impersonal, knowing neither the poet nor his address. He himself knew nobody; and those who knew everybody did not know him. Mr. Yeats wrote in after years to W. M.:— "Now I regret that I never met him, except once for a few minutes. An extreme idealism of the imagination seems to be incompatible in almost all with a perfectly harmonious relation to the mechanics of life."

When from Mr. Hugh Chisholm, then the assistant editor of the *St James's Gazette*, and the writer of an appreciative notice in that paper, came a request, reinforcing his printed admiration, for an autograph copy of the "Daisy," the compliment was made through a third person. Another stranger, Mr. John Davidson, wrote the *Speaker*'s praises:—

"Here are dominion—domination over language, and a sincerity as of Robert Burns. . . . We must turn from Mr. Thompson, the latest, and perhaps the greatest, of English Roman Catholic poets of post-Reformation times, to the exalted Puritan voice that sang 'At a Solemn Music' for a strain combining in like manner intensity and magnificence."

"The frenzied pæans of his admirers by profession" were the words of a leading critic, and might well have stirred a desire in Francis to explain that he neither knew nor could profit his reviewers. When one journal became more explicit in its charges he went so far as to compose, but not to despatch, a reply. His reserve in public did not mean that he was so little contentious

that he never smote his foes in private. He was full of unspoken arguments, like the man you see talking to himself, or smiling as he walks, and of whom you may be sure that he is confounding or dismissing an opponent. The solitary man is full of good answers, but they belong to an interview from which, over soon, he is speeding. So it was with Thompson—in the mental " ring," in the note-book, he occasionally triumphed:—

" I need hardly say I have not escaped the accusation of belonging to a ' Mutual Admiration Society.' There are few writers, I fancy, but have at one time or another been surprised by the experience. For it is often an odd surprise. I myself, for example, am a recluse; with one or two intimate friends whom I see and one or two whom I don't. If in the latter case you deny the intimacy you fail to grasp that I am a recluse. I saw them ten years ago—there's intimacy. I might see them again next week, or year—why then, there's more intimacy. And I don't need to see them at all—go to, would you desire better intimacy ? The chapter of my intimate friends is as of the snakes in Ireland."

Another review of the poet's attitude towards his reception comes from Mrs. Blackburn at Pantasaph:—

" As for Francis, I hardly know what to say. I wish he would show some kind of human elation at his unprecedented success, but he seems to take it all in a dull, mechanical way, which is distressing. It is two months now since there has been any change in him. He stays away for days together, and, although he has promised to come to tea with me this afternoon, ten to one I shan't see him. Bishop Carroll was here last week, and saw Francis a good deal at the Monastery. He told me he would ask him to come and

stay a short time with him at Stalybridge, and take him to see his father. Francis seems so much to want to see his own people again. It is odd to read all the well-merited praise, and then realise how outside the pale of humanity this great genius is, more irresponsible than any child, with a child's fits of temper and want of foresight and control. He isn't doing a stroke of work, and stays in bed the best part of the day, and lately he falls asleep when he comes to see me. No one can do anything with him."

It was this man who, nevertheless, was as near his public as it is possible for a writer to be; he made his public. Nobody thought M. H. D. Traill, the writer of an article on Thompson in the *Nineteenth Century*, misjudged the chances of popularity when, on the publication of *Poems*, he wrote to W. M.: " If he is ever to become other than a ' poet's poet ' or ' critic's poet '— if indeed it is worth anyone's ambition to be other than that—it will only be by working in a different manner. A ' public ' to appreciate ' The Hound of Heaven ' is to me inconceivable." Mr. William Archer, another appreciator, expressed much the same view. Yet in the three years after Thompson's death the separate edition of " The Hound of Heaven " had sold fifty thousand copies; and later had a circulation in this form and in anthologies which is beyond calculation.

F. T. to W. M.:—

" I think Traill's article excellent and kind. But the *Athenæum*![1]— Call you this dealing favourably with a man? Heaven save me, then, from the unfavourable dealers! Of course, he is right about the ' To Monica Thought Dying '; but that and one or two other poems are not

[1] In which appeared a review by Mr. Arthur Symons.

sufficient on which to base a charge of making Mr. Patmore a model. It would have been well, indeed, for the restraint and sanity of the poems if I *had* submitted somewhat to the influence of Mr. Patmore. As for what Watson says, it is not, like Symons', unfair. The sale of the book is indeed astonishing."

Perhaps Patmore's article on *Poems* in the *Fortnightly Review*, July 1894, stands as the most important page in the history of the new poet's reception. It was rare, too, in its prediction of an early and general recognition:—

"Unlike most poets of his quality, who have usually had to wait a quarter of a century or more for adequate recognition, this poet is pretty sure of a wide and immediate acknowledgment. A singular and very interesting history will convince thousands whom the rumour of it may reach, that he is an 'extraordinary person'; the heroic faith in and devotion to the interests of his genius which, through long years, has been shown by at least two friends, one of them a lady not inferior in genius to his own; his recognition of her helpfulness by a series of poems which St John of the Cross might have addressed to St Theresa, and which, had she not established by her own writings a firm and original hold on fame, would have carried her name to posterity in company with that of 'Mrs. Ann Killigrew'; the very defects of his writing, which will render manifest, by contrast, its beauties, thereby ingratiating 'the crowd, incapable of perfectness'; his abundant and often unnecessary obscurities, which will help his popularity, as Browning's did his, by ministering to the vanity of such as profess to be able to see through millstones;—are all circumstances which will probably do more for his immediate acceptance by the literary public than qualities which ought to place him, even should he do no more than he has done, in the permanent ranks of fame, with Cowley and with Crashaw.

" Considering that these eighty-one pages of verse are all that Mr. Thompson has done, there would seem room for almost any hope of what he may do, but for one circumstance which seems to limit expectancy. He is, I believe, about thirty-five years old—an age at which most poets have written as well as they have ever written, and at which the faculty of ' taste,' which is to a poet what chastity is to a woman, is usually as perfect as it is likely ever to be. It was Cowley's incorrigible defect of taste, rather than any fault of the time, that was responsible for the cold conglomerate of grit which constitutes the mass of his writing, though he was occasionally capable of ardent flights of pure and fluent verse; and it is by the same shortcoming in Crashaw that we are continually reminded that what he would have us accept for concrete poetic passion is mainly an *intellectual* ardour. The phraseology of a perfectly poetic ardour is always ' simple, sensuous, and passionate,' and has a seemingly unconscious *finish from within*, which no ' polish ' can produce. Mr. Thompson, as some critic has remarked, is a ' greater Crashaw.' He has never, in the present book of verses, done anything which approaches, in technical beauty, to Crashaw's ' Music's Duel '; but then Crashaw himself never did anything else approaching it; and, for the rest of his work, it has all been equalled, if not excelled, in its peculiar beauties, as well as its peculiar defects, by this new poet. . . . Mr. Thompson's poetry is ' spiritual ' almost to a fault. He is always, even in love, upon mountain heights of perception, where it is difficult for even disciplined mortality to breathe for long together. The lady whom he delights to honour he would have to be too seraphic even for a seraph. He rebukes her for wearing diamonds, as if she would be a true woman if she did not delight in diamonds. The crown of stars of the *Regina Cœli* is not more naturally gratifying and becoming to her who, as St Augustine says, had no sin, ' except, perhaps, a little vanity,' than the tiara of brilliants is to the *Regina Mundi*. Mr. Thompson is a Titan among recent poets; but he should not forget that a Titan may require and obtain renovation of his strength

by occasional acquaintance with the earth, without which the heavens themselves are weak and unstable. The tree Igdrasil, which has its head in heaven and its roots in hell (the ' lower parts of the earth '), is the image of the true man, and eminently so of the poet, who is eminently man. In proportion to the bright and divine heights to which it ascends must be the obscure depths in which the tree is rooted, and from which it draws the mystic sap of its spiritual life. Since, however, Mr. Thompson's spirituality is a real ardour of life, and not the mere negation of life, which passes, with most people, for spirituality, it seems somewhat ungracious to complain of its predominance. It is the greatest and noblest of defects, and shines rather as an eminent virtue in a time when most other Igdrasils are hiding their heads in hell and affronting heaven with their indecorous roots."

Sister Songs, published two years later, in 1895, belongs to the same period of composition as *Poems*. In all the poetry there is personal revelation, his own experience being the invisible wind that moves the cloudy pageant of his verse. But in *Sister Songs* we see the experience itself; he alludes to his nights in the streets, and can here say with Donne: " . . . my verse, the strict map of my misery. . . ." But not in the first place is it a poem of sad experience, a dismal offering for little girls. It is what it would be—beautiful, elaborate, innocent. The second part is addressed to Monica Meynell; the first is a dance of words in honour of a younger sister—" For homage unto Sylvia, her sweet, feat ways."

With the publication of *Sister Songs* came a second batch of reviews, and the poet wrote:—

" I should much like to see further notices of my book, if you would not find it too much trouble. Lane has sent

me only Le Gallienne's in the *Star*. From another source I have had the *Daily Chronicle*, *St. James's*, and *Manchester Guardian*. Lane speaks of reviews in the *Realm*, *Saturday*, and *Athenæum*. If the two latter are by Symons, as he says, I do not want to see them. He is the only critic of mine that I think downright unfair. . . . Coventry has sent me a poem of Mrs. Meynell's from the *P. M. G.*—'Why Wilt Thou Chide?' No woman ever wrote a thing like that: and but one man—Coventry himself."

Coventry Patmore to F. T.:—

"LYMINGTON, *July* 29, 1895.—I am glad you think as I do about those 'wonderful verses' (A. M.'s). I have quoted your words in a letter I have written to our Friend. They will delight her greatly. . . . It is good news that you are writing prose. You know how perfectly great I think what I have read of your prose. After all, the greatest things must be said in prose. Music is too weak to follow the highest thought. I will try and go to Pantasaph as soon as I have arranged some engagements which have come into the foreground since I wrote to you. . . . Yours ever, COVENTRY PATMORE."

Thompson himself adopted the view that *Sister Songs* lacked a proper sequence of idea and incident, or rather that, to the unready reader, it apparently lacked such sequence.

Mr. Arnold Bennett's "Don't say I didn't tell you," saved fortunately from the flimsy pages of *Woman*, July 3, 1895, reads proudly now:—

"I declare that for three days after this book appeared I read nothing else. I went about repeating snatches of it—snatches such as—

> The innocent moon, that nothing does but shine,
> Moves all the labouring surges of the world.

My belief is that Francis Thompson has a richer natural genius, a finer poetical equipment, than any poet save Shakespeare. Show me the divinest glories of Shelley and Keats, even of Tennyson, who wrote the ' Lotus Eaters ' and the songs in ' The Princess,' and I think I can match them all out of this one book, this little book that can be bought at an ordinary bookseller's shop for an ordinary, prosaic crown. I fear that in thus extolling Francis Thompson's work, I am grossly outraging the canons of criticism. For the man is alive, he gets up of a morning like common mortals, not improbably he eats bacon for breakfast; and every critic with an atom of discretion knows that a poet must not be called great until he is either dead or very old. Well, please yourself what you think. But, in time to come, don't say I didn't tell you."

Mr. Arnold Bennett was later to discover for himself the secret of large sales: he did not negotiate them for his poet, who complained of " my ill-starred volume—which has sold only 349 copies in twelve months." *New Poems* did much worse.

F. T. to W. M.:—

" Many thanks for the *Edinburgh*, which has indeed pleased me. I did not expect such an enthusiastic review of my work, and particularly of my last book, from a periodical so conservative and slow-moving. I am very gratified by what you say about Meredith. You know, I think, that I hold him the most unquestionable genius among living novelists. One remark goes curiously home—that on the higher poetic rank of metaphor as compared to simile. It has always been a principle of my own; so much so, that I never use a simile if I can use a metaphor. The observation on the burden of the poem to Sylvia shows a metrical sense unfortunately very unusual in our day."

The *Morning Post* reviewer dwelt on his " incomprehensible sentiments and unknown words," and even

his friends had before publication warned him that his meanings were sometimes lost in the " foam and roar of his phraseology." Lionel Johnson[1] was hardly more candid than some others when he said of Francis Thompson that he had done more to harm the English language than the worst American newspapers: *corruptio optimi pessima.*

But that he was no very hardened coiner of words may be gathered from his comments on the objections:—

" By the way, I see Blackburn has queried ' lovesome.' Is there no such word? I never made a doubt that there was. It is at any rate according to analogy. If it is an error, then ' lovely ' must be substituted throughout, which differs somewhat in *nuance* of meaning."

A complaint of William Archer's he meets by quoting Campion's " Cold age deafs not there our ears," and Shakespeare's " Beastly dumbed by him," and Keats' " Nighing to that mournful place ":—

" I doubt me but English verbs are, or were, commonly suggested and derived from adjectives; and had I time and a British Museum ticket would resolve the matter for myself. Anyway I have coined nought to the like; I mistrust not but your same ' dumbed ' is all Archer has against me in this quarrel, and all he shall advance against me whereon to build such charge, nor shall he find another like verb in ought of verse I have written, search he like a lantern of Diogenes. The word lay to my hand and was a right lusty and well-pithed word, close grained and forcible as a cudgel,

[1] Another and greater Johnson had written of Shakespeare: " I have seen a collection of anomalies which show that he has corrupted language by every mode of depravation "!

wherefore I used it; and surely I would have used a dozen such had they served my turn."

" ' *Monstrance*,' ' *vaultages*,' ' *arcane*,' ' *sciential*,' ' *coerule*,' ' *intemperably*,' ' *englut* ' (past participle), ' *most strainedest* ' (double superlative)," complained A. T. Q. C. in the *Speaker*, " these and the like are not easily allowed by anyone possessing sense of the history of the language."

" Monstrance " is not the only word in that list that shows how hastily the critics fell foul of him, and those who think that Shakespeare bears some part in " the history of the language " may take " most stillest " for a fair precedent of a double superlative. Mr. E. K. Chambers, reviewing *Sister Songs* in 1895, wrote:— " He showers out obsolete words, or at will coins new ones." " The obsolete ' riped,' " " the rare ' heavened,' " " impitiable," " saddenedly," " anticipatedly," " immeditatably "—with these the critics were wroth. Parodies appeared in the *Saturday Review*— " Latinate Vocabules "—and in the *Westminster Gazette*. While even " monstrance " was found to have the suspect ring of a coined word, many of the words he did coin (according to Mr. Beacock's Concordance they number 130 odd) passed unnoticed. They include plain-going utilitarian feminine forms such as *auxiliatrix*, *consortress ;* plurals such as *innocences*, *translucencies ;* adjectives with the prefix *un*, such as *undelirious;* verbs with the suffix *less*, such as *rebukeless* and *delimitless;* a number of substantives called into use as verbs, *e.g.*, *mænadize*, *empillared*, *chaplet ;* and a less comfortable group of adverbs, such as *supportlessly*, *predilectedly*, and the unsustainable *tamelessly*, meaning untamably. (Browning's " abashless " is of the same

class.) He did not, like Rossetti, go to the glossaries; but "Nares," of which he never possessed a copy, contains his credentials. Thus *shard* is Shakespearean. Drayton has *shawm*. "*Soilure*" is in "Troilus and Cressida"; "with drunken *spilth* of wine" in "Timon of Athens." "*Swart*," "*swink*," "*targe*," "*amerce*," "*avouch*," "*assoile*" are all of common acceptance; "*bruit*," "*eld*," "*empery*," "*immediacy*," "*ostent*," "*threne*," "*incarnadine*," and "*troublous*" are all Shakespearean, and more. "*To gloom*," according to precedent, is a verb, and so are "*to englut*," and "*to fantasy*"; "*lustyhed*" is Drayton's and Spenser's. "*Rondure*" is common; "*rampire*" is in Dryden even; "*to port*" and "*ported*," and, of course, "*natheless*" are accepted. "*Crystalline*," being Cowley's if for no other reason, would be ready to his tongue; "*devirginate*," which has the sound of one of his own prolongations, is Donne's; "*adamantean*" he would probably have coined, if Milton had not done so before him. "*Temerarious*" came to him as naturally as to Sir Thomas Browne. "*Femineity*" is Browning's, and "*devisal*" Patmore's, in their modern usage. "*Immures*" as a substantive still annoys his readers, but only before they find it in "Troilus and Cressida."

His Latinisms were frequent. Of these the only test to the point is Dryden's: "If too many foreign words are poured in, it looks as if they were designed, not to assist the natives, but to conquer them." From Thompson's own opinion of Sir Thomas Browne, a constant favourite, that his "prose suffered neither from excess of Latinities nor from insufficiency in the

vulgar tongue," we learn that he was mindful of the balance.

In answer to the common rebuke against him, A. M. in the *Nation*, November 23, 1907, says:—

> " Obviously there are Latinisms and Latinisms ! Those of Gibbon and Johnson, and of their time generally, serve to hold passion well at arm's length; they are the mediate and not the immediate utterance of human feeling. But in F. T. the majestic Latin word is forged hot on the anvil of the artificer. No Old English in the making could be readier or closer."

His own rule of writing was, " That it is the infantries of language, so to speak, which must make up the mass of a poet's forces; *i.e.*, common diction of the many in every age; the numerous terms of prose, apart from special poetic diction."

For his words he had not far to seek. In the offices of the Church he found words to his hand, but he did not go to the offices on their account. It is doubtful if he borrowed even a monosyllable from a poet he did not love. Very rarely he made notes: " *Pleached*— an invaluable word," is the only memorandum I have come across. He had no list, like Rossetti's, of " stunning words for poetry," among them " gonfalon," " virelay," " citole," and " shent." He was at no pains to coin or collect, nor even to possess a theory.

Being led on in certain studies, he became attached to the terms specially connected with those studies. The process may be traced in the case of his use of the names of extinct animals. Their discovery he calls pure romance; " but the romance which lies in the new and unimagined forms, hidden from the poets

and tale-tellers of all previous ages, and given up to eyes almost satiate with wonders, has yet to find its writers. . . . Tennyson has seen its uses for large and impressive allusion—

Nature brings not back the Mastodon,—

but Tennyson is almost alone even in the use of the theme. In an occasional later and younger poet you may find mention of the plesiosaure or other typical monster." Again, still reviewing Mr. Seeley's *Dragons of the Air*, Thompson writes:—

"We have strayed, it seems, into the ancient forge and workshop of Nature, where she is busy with her first experiments. . . . We behold, cast off from her anvil, in bewildering succession, shapes so fantastical, grotesque, and terrible, as never peopled the most lawless dreams of an Eastern haschish-eater; apparitions of intertwisted types and composite phantasms, more and more strange than all the brute gods of Egypt. We are among the rough drafts of a creation."

Of his partial acceptance of the criticism of the Press he makes sign in a note he had intended printing in *New Poems*:—

"Of words I have coined or revived I have judged fit to retain but few; and not more than two or three will be found in this book. I shall also be found, I hope, to have modified much the excessive loading both of diction and imagery which disfigured my former work."

That the note was not printed means perhaps that he repented of his repentance. He was not easily brought to correct or discard—the initial process of composition had been too careful to be lightly tampered with.

But to A. M. he was always attentive and sometimes submissive. This letter she wrote him during the making of *Poems* :—

"The Bible has 'unquenchable,' and I don't think it could have 'quenchless.' Lowell has 'exhaustless' somewhere. I think one can strictly hold 'less' to equal 'minus' or 'without,' and with these the verb is impossible. I remember refusing to be taught a setting of some words of Praed's that had 'tameless' for 'untamable,' so you see it is an old objection with me. I must confess that 'dauntless' has taken a very firm place in the language. Never has there been such a dance of words as in 'The Making of Viola.' All other writers make their words dance on the ground with a certain weight, but these go in the blue sky. I have to unsay everything I said in criticism of that lovely poem. I think the long syllables make themselves valued in every case. But I do not like three syllables in the course of the poem—the three that give the iambic movement. I have not made up my mind as to the alternative endings. They are all so beautiful."

The suggestions as to metrical modifications he accepted. I print here a letter of which, however, the interest for me is not etymological: its interest is that he troubled to address so inattentive a friend at all on such a theme:—

"Dear Ev., as to the note you asked, the Latin *simplex* is from *plecto* (or rather its root), 'I entwine,' and some root allied to the Greek 'together.' The root-meaning is therefore 'twined together,' and it primarily means that which has synthesis or unity as opposed to that which is confused or perplexed by lack of oneness. When Wordsworth (is it not?) somewhere speaks of a being 'simple and unperplexed,' consciously or unconsciously he uses the word mainly in this original sense, though few even thoughtful folk explicitly so grasp it. It is degenerated in the common

mouth to the meaning almost of 'elementary.' Milton, saying poetry should be simple, sensuous, and passionate (is that the third word ?), by *simple* means synthetic—opposed to prose (especially, doubtless, he had in mind philosophic prose), which is analytic.—Yours, F. T."

He never dropped the habit of words. One of his last letters, dated from Southwater, September 14, 1907, was written when he had detected a random paragraph of A. M.'s in the *Daily Chronicle*. To her he wrote:—

"You might have added to the *willow* par. the Latin *salex* and the Eng. *sallow :*

Among the river sallows borne aloft
Or sinking, as the light wind lives or dies !

The English, I should guess, may be from one of the Romance tongues; if so all these modern forms are, mediately or immediately, from the Latin. But it is interesting to find the Latin and the Irish really identical (if you neglect the inflectional endings in the former)—salic and salagh. 'Tis but the difference 'twixt a plain and a guttural hard consonant—for connective vowels are unstable endlessly. As for k and g, you see, *e.g.*, *reg*-o evolve *rec*-tum."

He watched with much interest his words creep into currency. *Roseal*—"most beloved of my revivals"—which he had known only in Lodge's *Glaucus and Scylla*, he saw reappear in Dowson and other writers, and realised it was probably from Thompson and not from Lodge that it had been learnt. In these revivals he saw the sign—the only one, he said—of his influence. He could hardly have expected that two years after his death "labyrinthine" would be a word used not only in poetry books, but on political platforms—by Mr. George Wyndham and his less-versed opponents;

or that Mr. Asquith's use of " fuliginous " would irk nobody. The objection to a poet's range of phrase is but a part of a general laziness in language. The curtailment of our vocabulary continues year by year, and if we love the poet—the Wordsworth of " Daffodils " or the Thompson of " Daisy "—as a man of few words, we should admire him also for being at times a man of many, and the corrector of our own increasing shortness of speech.

CHAPTER VIII

INFLUENCES

BY 1889 Rossetti had become an absorbing interest, but Coleridge, in what F. T. calls his Pre-Rossettian days, "had been my favourite poet." Before Coleridge, Shelley. An early poem not elsewhere printed, written on the anniversary of Rossetti's death, illustrates the closeness of his affection:—

He taught our English art to burn
With colours from diviner skies,
He taught our English art to gaze
On Nature with a learner's eyes:
That hills which look into the heaven
Have their fair bases on the earth;
God paints His most angelic hues
On vapours of a terrene birth.

May God his locks with glories twine,
Be kind to all he wrought amiss!
May God his locks with glories twine
And give him back his Beatrice.
This day the sad heart ceased to pine,
I trust his lady's beats at his,
And two beat in a single bliss.

Close borrowing from Coleridge, in which he pronounces the words and rhymes of his master but keeps his voice ringing high with personality, is found at the

close of "To my Godchild." Coleridge's "Ne Plus Ultra" ends:—

> Reveal'd to none of all the Angelic State,
> Save to the Lampads Seven[1]
> That watched the Throne of Heaven!

Thompson's ending is:—

> Pass the crystalline sea, the Lampads seven:—
> Look for me in the nurseries of Heaven.

We have seen an ending; here is a borrowed opening:—

> Like a lone Arab, old and blind,
> Some caravan had left behind,
> Who sits beside a ruin'd well,
> Where the shy sand-asps bask and swell;
> And now he hangs his aged head aslant
> And listens for a human sound—in vain, etc.

It develops into an allegory of illusion: the poet sits desolate, and, thinking Love visits him, is deceived. Just thus is Thompson's passage beginning—

> As an Arab journeyeth
> Through a sand of Ayaman,
> Lean Thirst, lolling its cracked tongue, etc.

The staging, the characters, are the same. Perhaps curiosity in opium-eating led him early and impressionably to the study of Coleridge. "The Pains of Sleep" brings their experiences cheek to cheek—

[1] Revelation iv 5, ". . . there were seven lamps burning before the Throne, which are the seven spirits of God."

haggard cheek to haggard cheek. Thompson wrote a prose tale embodying the same terror of dreams and dream-existence. Both used humorous verse and conversation for a means of escape. They laughed to forget, and punned, not so much to laugh, as to be distracted in the exercise. One of them did the talking much better than the other; but their tongues moved to the same command, their voices ran on from the same fear. Even "Love dies, Love dies, Love dies—Ah! Love is dead" is the reflection of a page of Coleridge prose.

These are casual likenesses, found on the penetrable levels of resemblance, comparable to the coincidence of the after-collegiate enlisting of the two men. But Francis Thompson, as it happens, has been explicit on both the unreachable quality of Coleridge and the extent of his influence:—

"No other poet, perhaps, except Spenser, has been an initial influence, a generative influence, on so many poets. Having with that mild Elizabethan much affinity, it is natural that he should be a 'poets' poet' in the rarer sense—the sense of fecundating other poets. As with Spenser, it is not that other poets have made him their model, have reproduced essentials of his style (accidents no great poet will consciously perpetuate). The progeny are sufficiently unlike the parent. It is that he has incited the very sprouting in them of the laurel-bough, has been to them a fostering sun of song. Such a primary influence he was to Rossetti—Rossetti, whose model was far more Keats than Coleridge. Such he was to Coventry Patmore, in whose work one might trace many masters rather than Coleridge." ("Such he was to me," F. T., a reviewer in a public print, refrained from adding.)[1] But, he continues, "no poet has been

[1] In the *Academy*, February 6, 1897.

senseless enough to imitate the inimitable. One might as well try to paint air as to catch a style so void of all manner that it is visible, like air, only in its results. . . . Imitation has no foothold; it would tread on glass."

F. T. noted in the *Academy*, November 20, 1897, the direct coincidence of Browning's " Its sad in sweet, its sweet in sad," and Crashaw's " Sweetness so sad, sadness so sweet." It did not come within his scope as a reviewer to mention the doubly direct coincidence (or something nearer) of his own: " At all the sadness in the sweet, the sweetness in the sad."

Coleridge and the other poets to whom Coleridge had guided him, Shelley and, in prose, de Quincey, are prominent in his early reading. To go to de Quincey's " Daughter of Lebanon " for the pedigree of " The Hound of Heaven " is like going to the grocer's for the seeds, in coloured packets, of the passion flower. But the Victorian tassels of the earlier piece do not hide its lessons—" to suffer that God should give by seeming to refuse "—and pursuit is the theme common to both, and common to writers of most ages. De Quincey did no more than hand it on. From St Augustine's " Thou wast driving me on with Thy good, so that I could not be at rest until Thou wast manifest to the eye of my soul "; to Meister Eckhart's " He who will escape Him only runs to His bosom; for all corners are open to him," and so on, the idea is the same, though less elaborated and dramatic than in " The Hound."

In the " Mistress of Vision " the scenery and the lady are Shelleyan. Thus might it have been written had such thoughts gained desired expression through Shelley. The thoughts are Francis Thompson's;

the mode the other's. Mr. Beacock refers one to passages of the " Witch of Atlas," but the likeness is too elusively general to be caught in particular verses, and such things as the borrowing of " blosmy " are nothing more than clues, like the fragmentary debris of a paper-chase, to the whereabouts of an influence.

Into an early scrap-book he copied a deal of Donne and Stevenson (including *Father Damien* and poems), a touch of Andrew Lang, more of Blunt, a little Meredith, much Rossetti and Cowley, some Suckling, the inevitable Browne, and a Theodore Watts. Drayton, too, is met in the Thompsonian verses: " Hear, my Muses, I demand," etc., so that, when Mr. Chesterton says that the shortest way of describing the Victorian age is to say that Francis Thompson stood outside it, he might have gone on, with a little access of wilfulness, to say that the seventeenth century was best described by saying that in it was Francis Thompson.

Marvell he had not read till after his first books—" Just Crashaw and a little Cowley—and I had formed my style before I knew Cowley, whom I really did curiously resemble; though none perceived it, because none had read Cowley." The Crashaw descent may be traced by way of Coleridge, who said of certain lines of the " Hymn to St Teresa " that " They were ever present in my mind whilst writing the second part of ' Christabel '; if, indeed, by some process of the mind, they did not suggest the first thought of the whole poem." Crashaw's Romanism did not interfere with Coleridge's pleasure; though in reading Herbert, whom he found " delicious," and at a time when he could note " that he was comparatively but little known," he

paused over inquiries as to the exactness of that author's conformity to Protestantism. Coleridge was much taken with Herbert's "The Flower," a poem "especially affecting"—and naturally, to a poet.

Very close is the resemblance, noted by Mr. Beacock, between Herbert's

> Only thy grace, which with these elements comes,
> Knoweth the ready way,
> And hath the privie key
> Op'ning the soul's most subtile rooms;
> While those to spirits refin'd, at doore attend
> Despatches from their friend,

and Thompson's

> Its keys are at the cincture hung of God.

Mr. Beacock has also pointed out the resemblance between Southwell's

> Did Christ manure thy heart to breed him briers?
> Or doth it need this unaccustom'd soyle
> With hellish dung to fertile heaven's desires?

and Thompson's

> Whether man's heart or life it be which yields
> Thee harvest, must Thy harvest-fields
> Be dunged with rotten death?

Remembering his own acknowledgment—"just Crashaw and a little Cowley"—one may turn to Mr. Garvin's equally accurate summing up in the *Bookman*, March 1897:—

" He is an argonaut of literature, far travelled in the realm of gold, and he has in a strange degree the assimilative mind that takes suggestions as a cat takes milk. . . . ' The Daisy ' was strangely Wordsworthian. But ' Dream-Tryst ' was like Shelley, and had that strange ethereal poignancy. There was the ' Dead Cardinal of Westminster,' with its stanzas of shuddering beauty upon the prescience of death. There was the resplendent ' Judgment in Heaven,' with the trenchant Elizabethan apothegm of its epilogue. The ' Corymbus for Autumn ' was an overwhelming improvisation of wild and exorbitant fantasy. To be familiar with it is to repent of having ever reproached it for a splendid pedantry and a monstrous ambition. On the whole, if Mr. Thompson had stopped at his first volume we should have judged him more akin in stature and temperament to Marlowe than to any other great figure in English poetry. It seemed to reveal the same ' high astounding terms,' the same vast imagery; the same *amour de l'impossible ;* the soul striking the sublime stars, the intolerable passion for beauty. But Mr. Thompson did not stop there. After the publication of his second volume, when it became clear that the ' Hound of Heaven ' and ' Sister Songs ' should be read together as a strict lyrical sequence, there was no longer any comparison possible except the highest, the inevitable comparison with even Shakespeare's Sonnets. The Sonnets are the greatest soliloquy in literature. The ' Hound of Heaven ' and ' Sister Songs ' together are the second greatest; and there is no third. In each case it is rather consciousness imaged in the magic mirror of poetry than explicit autobiography."

To a certain extent Thompson states his own case in treating of Mangan's liberties with his Irish originals:—

" They are outrageous, or would be outrageous were the success not so complete. But poetry is a rootedly immoral art, in which success excuses well-nigh everything. That in the soldier is flat blasphemy which in the captain,

the master of his craft, is but commendable daring. Exactly as a great poet may plagiarise to his heart's content, because he plagiarises well, so the truly poetical translator may reindite a foreign poem and call it a translation."

And in reviewing Henley's *Burns* he writes, again with the braggart touch of one who may have gone the same rascally road: "Spartan law holds good in literature, where to steal is honourable, provided it be done with skill and dexterity: wherefore Mercury was the patron both of thieves and poets." Touching a more serious aspect of the case, he writes with Patmore in his mind: "There are some truths so true, that upon everyone who sees them clearly they force almost the same mode of expression; they create their own formulas."

It might not have been guessed that the author of "Horatius" had the means wherewith to lend to the wealthy; but Macaulay's lines "On the Battle of Naseby"—

Oh! wherefore come ye forth, in triumph from the North,
With your hands, and your feet, and your raiment all red?
And wherefore doth your rout send forth a joyous shout?
And whence be the grapes of the wine-press which ye tread?

supply the model for the ecclesiastical ballad "The Veteran of Heaven" which begins—

O Captain of the wars, whence won Ye so great scars?
In what fight did Ye smite, and what manner was the foe?
Was it on a day of rout they compassed Thee about,
Or gat Ye these adornings when Ye wrought their overthrow?

" I am disposed to put in a good word for Macaulay's ballads," he has said.

Copyright in a fair thought, a keen observation, a neat phrase, is seldom strictly preserved. If accident does not take two or more writers to the same hill, show them the same sunset, and charge their minds with the same words, plagiarism will serve the purpose. Even if Cowley's rare wit had remained in manuscript unseen, its turns would not have been for many centuries entirely his own. Literature will out. To one or the other, to plagiarism or accident, is due a likeness between Thompson's

> So fearfully the sun doth sound,
> Clanging up beyond Cathay;
> For the great earthquaking sunrise rolling up beyond Cathay,

and Mr. Kipling's " And the sun came up like thunder out of China, 'cross the Bay." Again:

> A wind got up frae off the sea.
> It blew the stars as clear could be.
> It blew in the een of a' the three,
> And the mune was shining clearly!

sang Stevenson's Highlander years before Thompson wrote

> And a great wind blew all the stars to flare.

But in neither case is Thompson, though the dates are against him, proved guilty of theft.

Of a review of his *Poems* in the *St James's Gazette* he says that he deprecates in it—

" the to-me-bewildering comparison to Matthew Arnold. 'Tis not merely that I have studied no poet less; it is that I

should have thought we were in the sharpest contrast. His characteristic fineness lies in that very form and restraint to which I so seldom attain: his characteristic drawback in the lack of that full stream which I am seldom without. The one needs and becomes strict banks—for he could not fill wider ones; the other too readily overflows all banks."

Of the prose of the Vulgate he wrote in a review of a paper by Dr. Barry on St Jerome's revision:—

"No tongue can say so much in so little. And literary diffuseness is tamed in our Vulgate not only by the terser influence of the rustic Latin, but by the needs begotten of Hebrew brevity. Not to any unprejudiced ear can this Vulgate Latin be unmusical. '*Surge, propera, amica mea, columba mea, formosa mea, et veni*'; that and the whole passage which follows, or that preceding strain closing in—'*Fulcite me floribus, stipate me malis, quia amore langueo*': could prose have more impassioned loveliness of melody? Compare it even with the beautiful corresponding English of the Authorised Version; the advantage in music is not to the English, but to the soft and wooing fall of these deliciously lapsing syllables. Classic prose, could it even have forgotten its self-conscious living-up to foreign models, had never the heart of passion for movement such as this, or as the queenly wail of the *Lamentations*—'*Quomodo sedet sola civitas plena populo! facta est quasi vidua domina gentium!*'

"If the Vulgate be the fountain-source, the rivers are numerous—and neglected. How many outside the ranks of ecclesiastics ever open the Breviary, with its Scriptural collocations over which has presided a wonderful symbolic insight, illuminating them by passages from the Fathers and significant prayers? The offices of the Church are suggested poetry—that of the Assumption, for example, the 'Little Office,' and almost all those of Our Lady. The very arrangement of the liturgical year is a suggested epic, based as it is on a deep parallel between the evolution of the seasons and that of the Christian soul of the human race."

And further on:—

"It is a pedant who cannot see in St Augustine one of the great minds of the world, master of a great style. Some flights in the *Confessions* are almost lyric, such as the beautiful '*Sero te amavi*,' or the magnificent discourse on memory. The last books especially of the *City of God* would sometimes be no wise incongruous beside the *Paradiso* of Dante. St Bernard's prose rises at times into a beauty which is essentially that of penetratingly ethereal poetry: not for nothing has Dante exalted him in the *Paradiso;* not for nothing does such a man exalt such men. In them is the meat and milk and honey of religion; and did we read them our souls would be larger-boned."

Of his own acquaintance with the Bible he writes:—

"The Bible as an influence from the literary standpoint has a late but important date in my life. As a child I read it, but for its historical interest. Nevertheless, even then I was greatly, though vaguely, impressed by the mysterious imagery, the cloudy grandeurs, of the Apocalypse. Deeply uncomprehended, it was, of course, the pageantry of an appalling dream; insurgent darkness, with wild lights flashing through it; terrible phantasms, insupportably revealed against profound light, and in a moment no more; on the earth hurryings to and fro, like insects of the earth at a sudden candle; unknown voices uttering out of darkness darkened and disastrous speech; and all this in motion and turmoil, like the sands of a fretted pool. Such is the Apocalypse as it inscribes itself on the verges of my childish memories. In early youth it again drew me to itself, giving to my mind a permanent and shaping direction. In maturer years Ecclesiastes (casually opened during a week of solitude in the Fens) masterfully affected a temperament in key with its basic melancholy. But not till quite later years did the Bible as a whole become an influence. Then, however, it came with decisive power. But not as it had influenced most writers. My style, being already formed, could receive

no evident impress from it: its vocabulary had come to me through the great writers of our language. In the first place its influence was mystical; it revealed to me a whole scheme of existence, and lit up life like a lantern."

" Assumpta Maria " is " vamped " from the office of our Lady; he had no notion of concealing its origin, but rather sought to point it out. The prayer to the Virgin is itself a confession.

Remember me, poor Thief of Song !

he wrote in 1893, with an enclosure of poems, including the " Assumpta Maria ":—

" They are almost entirely taken from the Office of the Assumption, some from the Canticle, a few images from the heathen mythology. Some very beautiful images are from a hymn by St Nerses the Armenian, rendered in *Carmina Mariana*. You will perceive therefore the reason of the motto from Cowley: ' Thou needst not make new songs, but say the old.' "

" I remember," Francis writes, " Father Anselm's expression of comical surprise at a passage in ' Her Portrait,' where I had employed the terms of Canon Law relating to ecclesiastical property. Why, he said, here's a whole page of *De Contractibus* in poetry. His surprise was increased when I remarked that I had never read any work on the subject. . . . I said I got the terms where anyone else could get them—from English history. Equal was the surprise of another person at finding a whole passage of Anna Kingsford in my poetry. It was a passage describing the earth's *aura*, really remarkably like a passage in a book I had not at the time read."

Generally in these cases he is an imitator by choice—independent in taking only what suits him and depending only where he will. In one case he was an imitator not by choice but by compulsion, a conscript follower. There was no more choice for him in following Patmore than for a son born like his father. Such a poem as " By Reason of Thy Law " was born of the *Unknown Eros* odes.

Here are quoted various sentences from his notebooks, letters, and published prose bearing on metre, or allied subjects. Of " Heard on the Mountain," a translation he made from Hugo—a metrical experiment:—

" That splendid fourteen-syllable metre of Chapman, to which Mr. Kipling has given a new vitality, I have here treated after the manner of Drydenian rhyming heroics; not only with the occasional triplet, but also the occasional Alexandrine, represented by a line of eight accents. Students of metre will see the analogy to be strict, the line of eight being merely the carrying to completion of the catalectic line of seven, as the Alexandrine is merely the filling out of the catalectic line of five accents."

Of " The Ode to the Setting Sun ":—

" An ode I have thought not unworthy of preservation, though it was my first published poem of any importance. In view of the considerable resemblance between the final stanza and a well-known stanza in Mr. Davidson's ' Ballad of a Nun,' it is right to state that ' The Ode to the Setting Sun ' was published as long ago as 1889. The poem has some interest to me in view of the frequent statement that I modelled the metre of ' The Hound of Heaven ' on the ode metre of Mr. Patmore. ' The Ode to the Setting Sun ' was published before I had seen any of Mr. Patmore's work; and a comparison of the two poems will therefore show

exactly the extent to which the later poem was affected by that great poet's practice. The ode metre of *New Poems* is, with this exception, completely based on the principles which Mr. Patmore may virtually be said to have discovered."

Of accent and quantity:—

"The classic poets are careful to keep up an interchange between accent and quantity, an approach and recession, just as is the case with the great English poets. Yet with all the lover-like coquetry between the two elements, they are careful that they shall never wed—again as with the great English poets. But (and here lies the difference) the position of the two elements is *exactly reversed*. It is quantity which gives the law—is the masculine element—in classic verse; it is accent in English. In English, quantity takes the feminine or subordinate place, as accent does in classic verse. In both it is bad metre definitely to unite the two."

Sending poetry from Pantasaph, October 1894, he writes to A. M.:—

"The long poem ('The Anthem of Earth') was written only as an exercise in blank verse; indeed, as you will see, I have transferred to it whole passages from my prose articles. So it is solely for your judgment on the metre that I send it. It is my first serious attempt to handle that form, and it is not likely that I have succeeded all at once; especially as I have not confined myself to the strict limits of the metre, but have laid my hand at one clash among all the licences with which the Elizabethans build up their harmonies. The question is whether individual passages succeed sufficiently to justify the belief that I might reach mastery with practice, or whether I fail in such a fashion as to suggest native inaptitude for the metre. I confess my practice is so slovenly that if anyone should assure me that my lines had eleven syllables apiece, I should be obliged to allow I had never counted them."

To the same purpose are notes on Henley's " Voluntaries ":—

" They are in so-called ' irregular ' lyric metre, ebbing and flowing with the motion itself. Irregular it is not, though the law is concealed. Only a most delicate response to the behests of inspiration can make such verse successful. As some persons have an instinctive sense of orientation by which they know the quarter of the East, so the poet with this gift has a subtle sense of hidden metrical law, and in his most seeming-vagrant metres revolves always (so to speak) round a felt though invisible centre of obedience."

The immethodical exactitude of his method is further suggested in his note-book:—

" Temporal variations of metre responsive to the emotions, like the fluctuations of human respiration, which also varies indefinitely, under the passage of changeful emotions, and yet keeps an approximate temporal uniformity."

Here he evidently alludes particularly to the ode metre of " The Unknown Eros," for which Patmore had claimed that the length of line was controlled by its emotional significance. On this subject another note must directly bear. It is to the effect that the matter forces the metre; that the poet is the servant, not master, of his theme, and that he must write in such metre as it dictates. Again he writes: " Every great poet makes accepted metre a quite new metre, imparts to it a totally new movement, impresses his own individuality upon it." And again: " All verse is rhythmic; but in the graver and more subtle forms the rhythm is veiled and claustral; it not only avoids obtruding itself, but seeks to withdraw itself from notice."

His own choice among his metrical exercises was "The Making of Viola," of which a critic has said (the *Nation*, November 23, 1907) "that the words seem never to alight, they so bound and rebound, and are so agile with life."

CHAPTER IX

AT MONASTERY GATES

IN 1892 he had gone to Pantasaph. He was quartered, at first, in Bishop's House, at the monastery gates,[1] and the sandalled friars looked after all his wants—from boots to dogma. "Thompson is ever so much better," writes Father Marianus soon after the poet's arrival. "He looks it too. He is less melancholy, in fact at times quite lively." His own first letter from Wales:—

"*C'en est fait*, as regards the opium. . . . I am very comfortable, thanks to your kindness and forethought. Father Anselm seems to have taken a fancy to me—also he is afraid of my being lonely—and comes to see me every other day. He took me all over the Monastery on Monday, and has just left me after a prolonged discussion of the things which 'none of us knows anything about,' as Marianus says when he is getting the worst of an argument."

Father Anselm, later Archbishop of Simla, was the one of the friars of whom the poet spoke as his philosophical schoolmaster, and to whom he was indebted for the awakening of new intellectual interests. Coventry Patmore, too, as his correspondence testifies, knew how to appreciate the hospitality and good talk of the friars. Both the poets contributed to the *Franciscan Annals* of Father Anselm's editorship. Between the younger poet and Father Anselm there sprang up a close friendship, which was not without its influence

[1] Afterwards he lodged at the post-office, and finally in a cottage on the hill behind the monastery.

upon Thompson's later work. It is not, perhaps, impertinent here and now to attribute to his association with the friars an allusion in one of the most famous of his lines. " The bearded counsellors of God " has the local colour if not of Paradise, at least of Pantasaph.[1] " Poetry clung about the cowls of his Order," wrote Francis, in dealing with the works of St Francis and of Thomas of Celano. He had the right companions, as far as any were admitted, for the new periods of composition. They, as he, had sacred commerce *cum Domina Paupertate*. These, his companions, were once named by her " my Brothers and most dear Friends "; they, entertaining her on bread and water, had given her a couch upon earth and the grass:

" When she asked for a pillow, they straightway brought her a stone, and laid it under her Head. So, after she had slept for a brief space in peace, she arose and asked the Brothers to show her their Cloister. And they, leading her to the Summit of a Hill, showed her the wide World, saying: This is our Cloister, O Lady Poverty. Thereupon she bade them all sit down together, and opening her mouth she began to speak unto them Words of Life."

Francis, her poet, heard though at that time he was not come to the hills about Pantasaph. He had himself found stones for pillows in the market-place, and had written of one to whom he had half-likened himself—

Anchorite, who didst dwell
With all the world for cell !

St Francis himself had other words for the same thought: " Meditate as much while on this journey as

[1] The Capuchins (Franciscans) are peculiar in aspect among Religious Orders as bearded friars.

if you were shut up in a hermitage or in your cell, for wherever we are, wherever we go, we carry our cell with us; Brother Body is our cell."

In April, 1894, an observer writes:—

"You will be glad to hear that Francis has written an Ode which is longer than anything he has done yet. Also that the 'frenzy' being on him he has begun another poem yesterday. Of course he is flying over hill and dale and never to be seen, but I am sure you will be as glad as I am at this fresh development—especially as your and Alice's visit has evidently called it forth."[1] To the departed visitors the poet himself wrote:—

"Dearest Wilfrid and Alice,—As you are together in my thoughts, so let me join you together in this note. I cannot express to you what deep happiness your visit gave me; how dear it was to see your faces again. I think 'the leaves fell from the day' indeed when your train went out of the station; and I never heard the birds with such sad voices. I send you herewith the poem I have been at work on. It is very long, as you will see—as long, I think, as Wordsworth's great ode. That would not matter—'so I were equal with him in renown.' But as it is——! My fear is that thought in it has strangled poetic impulse. However, of all that you are better judges than I. Does the dear Singer still refuse me her songs? My health is better again, though unfortunately more fluctuant than I could wish. Love to all the chicks. With very best love to yourselves, dear ones,—Yours ever,

Francis Thompson."

In another letter he tells of his recurring powers of composition: "Am overflowing with a sudden access of literary impulse. I think I could write a book in

[1] "After Her Going" was written in these days.

three months, if thoughts came down in such an endless avalanche as they are doing at present."

The writing done, he is again cast down:—

"I should be very glad if you will send me the *Edinburgh*. It would do me good; I never since I knew you felt so low-hearted and empty of all belief in myself. I could find it in my heart to pitch my book into the fire; and I shall be thoroughly glad to get it off to you, for my heart sinks at the sight or thought of it. The one remaining poem which had stuck in my gizzard at the last I succeeded in polishing off last night, sitting up all night to do it; and I must start on the preface as soon as this letter is off."

A neighbour's reminiscence is that given years later by Father David Bearne, S.J., who recalls two occasions on which he chatted with the poet:—

"He knew me only as a Jesuit student of theology, and though I longed to tell him how much I loved his work, I failed to do so, partly from a sort of reverential shyness, and partly because, though he was no chatterer, he led the conversation. On one occasion I know he had just been making a pilgrimage to St Winefride's Well. He spoke of it at length and with great enthusiasm. But my own mind was occupied with the man, rather than with what he said. . . . As men commonly understand the word, there was no 'fascination' about Thompson. There was something better. There was the *sancta simplicitas* of the true poet and the real child."

In 1893 his father was at Rhyl, and Francis sought him there, but without invitation. He writes:—

"I went over on Monday—only to find that he had left the previous Wednesday, after having been there for a month, which things are strange."

To Dr. Thompson the strangeness would be in Francis's unwontedly active desire to see him. It is probable

that each exaggerated the other's feeling of estrangement. When, in April 1896, Francis heard that his father was dying, he went to Ashton, but too late. After the funeral he writes:—

"I never saw my father again, I cannot speak about it at present. —— ——— made it very bitter for me. It has been nothing but ill-health and sorrow lately, but I must not trouble you with these things. I saw my sister looking the merest girl still, and sweeter than ever. She did not look a day older than ten years ago. She said I looked very changed and worn."[1]

At Pantasaph he had neighbours in the Feilding family, and it was to the monastery church that Lady Denbigh came to "make her soul" at the penitential seasons of the year. This church her husband began to build when he was an Anglican; then, changing his religion, he had changed the dedication of his bricks and mortar. From a letter of the Hon. Everard Feilding to W. M. after Thompson's death:—

"Your letter reached me at a time when my mind, like that, I think, of many others, was full of Francis Thompson; and during the preceding three nights I had been reading and re-reading aloud to two or three friends certain of his poems which had specially touched me, including the *Nocturn*, infinitely pathetic from my knowledge, however slight, of the man. I only met him three times, each time in the company of my friend Head,[2] who shared my admiration. Our meeting came about in an absurd enough wise. A ghost (possibly you have heard, or not heard, of my taste

[1] The mortuary card, preserved in F. T.'s prayer-book, runs:—"Of your charity pray for the soul of Charles Thompson, M.R.C.S., L.S.A., who departed this life April 9th, 1896, aged 72, fortified by the rites of Holy Church"—with the motto: "The silent and wise man shall be honoured."

[2] Dr. Henry Head, F.R.S.

for these creatures) was reported active in the neighbourhood of Pantasaph, on my brother's place in Wales. My own inclination supplied the motive, and an idle week of Head's the occasion, of a visit there, and we camped a few nights in a derelict mansion, rejoicing in the appropriately ominous name of Pickpocket Hall, in hopes of interviewing the spectre. Needless to say, we failed. But we got the story of the Irish monk; also the story of the practical nun, who scented buried treasure which she hoped to unearth to the profit of her community; and of the oldest inhabitant; and, finally, of the Poet. The people at the monastery had told us that Thompson had been a witness, and we decided on a call; and at about five one evening made our way to the tiny cottage where he lodged, and asked for him. He was still in bed. We returned at 6.30. He was *still* in bed. So we concocted a letter, suitable, as we imagined, to the person who had written Thompson's poems, not quite English, somewhat elided, and as inverted as we could manage, ending with an invitation to breakfast at 9.30 that night and a conference with our hobgoblin. And somewhat pleased with our effort, we retired to our haunted mansion and awaited events. At 9.30 he came and breakfasted while we supped. We said at once to one another: ' This is not the man to whom we wrote that letter.' For, instead of parables in polysyllables and a riot of imagery, we found simplicity and modesty and a manner which would have been almost commonplace if it had not been so sincere. But the charm and interest of his talk grew with the night, and it was already dawn when, the ghost long since forgotten, we escorted him back across the snow to his untimely lunch. He told us, I remember, of his poetical development, and of how, until recently, he had fancied that the end of poetry was reached in the stringing together of ingenious images, an art in which, he somewhat naïvely confessed, he knew himself to excel; but that now he knew it should reach further, and he hoped for an improvement in his future work. *New Poems* was subsequent to this meeting. It was only in his account of the ghost, which had ' charged his body like a battery so that

he felt thunderstorms in his hair,' that the imaginary individual to whom we had addressed our letter revealed himself.

"He dined with us twice afterwards, the second time appearing an hour late, with his head tied up in an appalling bandage, the result of having been knocked down by a hansom, so that I took his arrival under the circumstances as a compliment second only to your own kind letter. For years I haven't seen him. A letter, to ask him if he would renew acquaintance, has several times trembled on the tip of my pen; but I was told he had become inaccessible, and it never went, and now I am very sorry."

Francis wrote to A. M. later:—

"Is it true that you are going to collect your contributions to the papers during the last few years? I sincerely hope so. . . . There was a Dr. Head, a member of the Savile Club, over here last autumn with Everard Feilding, who spoke with great enthusiasm of your 'Autolycus.' He quoted a bit relating, I think, to Angelica Kaufmann,[1] who spent a large number of years in 'taking the plainness off paper.' The phrase delighted him, as it did me who had not seen it. . . . I passed a pleasant night with the two. We were sleeping in a haunted house to interview the ghost; but, as he was a racing-man, he probably found our conversation too literary to put off his incognito."

Coventry Patmore, as a member of the Third Order of St Francis, went in 1894 to stay at Pantasaph. It was to Father Anselm that Francis had lent Patmore's *Religio Poetae* before trusting himself to review it, and it was by the same friar that he was helped to appreciate Patmore's trustworthiness as a witness to divine truths. *Religio Poetae*, at first a stumbling-block, was to become the corner-stone of his later poetry. Two years before (in August 1892) he had said there were two points in

[1] It was not she, but Mrs. Delany.

C. P.'s teaching—as to the nature of the union between God and man in this world and the next, and the definition of the constitution of Heaven—that he refused absolutely to accept. He went specially to Crawley in 1892 to consult Father Cuthbert on these points. And he had at first only unwillingly admitted Patmore's power over him. To a passage of St John he adds a note that reveals his mood:—

"Amen, Amen, I say to thee; when thou wert younger, thou didst gird thyself, and didst walk where thou wouldst. But when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands and another shall gird thee, and lead thee where thou wouldst not."

To this he adds: "Apply to spiritual maturity."

Of Patmore's first visit he writes to A. M.:—

"I have had a charming visit from Mr. Patmore. He bore himself towards me with a dignity and magnanimity which are not of this age's stature. By the way, he repeated to me two or three short poems addressed to yourself. I hope there may be a series of such songs. You would then have a triple tiara indeed—crowned by yourself, by me, and highest crowned by him."

Afterwards in the more vivid light of memory, he said:—

"Though never a word on either side directly touched or explained the exceptional nature of the proposal, it was well understood between us—by me no less than by him—that it was no common or conventional friendship he asked of me. Not therefore has he sought out my Welsh hermitage; and scalpelled the fibres of me."

As a rule Francis found as much solitude among the Welsh mountains as in the desolation of the Harrow Road, but now Patmore walked with him, and he

remarks their common pleasure in the landscape, "particularly beautiful—something to do with the light, Patmore thinks." To be in common light is even better preparation for the communion of poets than to be on common ground. Friar and seer between them enclosed him at evening in the monastic parlour. Patmore writes home: "Francis Thompson and all the Fathers spent two hours last night in my room, and we had excellent talk. Father Anselm and I had a long talk about nuptial love, and he went all lengths with me in honour of the marriage embrace." And again: "I spend part of my day with Francis Thompson, who is a delightful companion, full of the best talk."

With the reading of *Religio Poetae* and the little book of St Bernard translations, Francis discovers their author to be "deeply perceptive of the Scriptures' symbolic meanings, scouted by moderns; and his instant intuitional use of the symbolic imagery gives his work the quality of substantial poetry. In proportion to the height of their sanctity the Saints are inevitable poets. Sanctity is essential song." These essays had moved Francis to the rare point of letter-writing:—

"DEAR MR. PATMORE,—I shall either send you with this, or later, a small poem of my own;[1] not for its literary merit, but because, without such a disclaimer, I fear you would think I had been the first to find your book 'd——d good to steal from.' As a matter of fact, it was written soon after Easter, and was suggested by passages in the liturgies of Holy Saturday, some of which—at rather appalling length—I have quoted at the head of its two parts. That was done for the sake of those who might cavil at its doctrines. Indeed—with superfluous caution—I intended much of it to

[1] "An Orient Ode."

be sealed; but your book has mainly broken the seals I had put upon it. There is quite enough in it of yours, without the additional presumption that I had hastened to make immediate use of your last book. As far as others are concerned, it must rest under that imputation to which the frequent coincidence in the selection of symbolism—as an example, the basing of a whole passage on the symbolic meaning of the *West*—very naturally leads. To yourself such coincidence is explicable, it will not be to ' outsiders.'—Yours always, FRANCIS THOMPSON."

And again:—

"The poem, even if I am to take your high and valued praises quite literally, has a defect of which you must be conscious, though you have courteously refrained from noticing it. It echoes your own manner largely, in the metre, and even in some of the diction—the latter a thing of which, I think, I have seldom before rendered myself guilty. Now it is possible in rare cases—*e.g.* Keats' ' Hyperion '—for an echo to take on body enough to survive as literature. But even should my poem so survive it must rest under the drawback of being no more distinctive Thompson than ' Hyperion ' is distinctive Keats.

"With regard to the other poem, I want to allude particularly to your invaluable correction of my misuse of the Western symbolism. On re-examination, the whole passage discloses a confusion of thought naturally causing a confusing of symbolism."

The next letters treat largely of the same theme. Patmore writes:—

"I wish I could see and talk to you on the subject of the symbolism you speak of. The Bible and all the theologies are full of it, but it is too deep and significant to get itself uttered in writing. The Psalms especially are full of it. On the matter of the ' North ' note that verse: ' Promotion cometh not from the South, nor the East, nor the West.' That is, it cometh from the North. The North seems always to signify the original Godhead, the ' Father ' —or the Devil.

For the same symbol is used in the Bible and in the mythologies for either extreme. 'Water,' for example, is constantly used for the sensible nature in its extreme purity, as in the Blessed Virgin, or in its extreme corruption. This honouring of the 'North' may very likely have been at the bottom of the seeking of the points of the compass from that quarter.

"I hope, some day, to see and have speech with you on this and other matters. Meantime I will only hint that the North represents the simple Divine virility, the South the Divine womanhood,[1] the East their synthesis in the Holy Spirit, and the West the pure *natural* womanhood 'full of grace.' I could give you no end of proofs, but it would take me months to collect them, from all I have read and forgotten."

This spacious correspondence, on things that will not "get themselves uttered in writing," was, nevertheless, continued. Francis responds:—

"You rather overlook the purport of my inquiry in regard to the symbolic question. I wanted to know if there had been any actual progressive development among the nations with regard to the quarters in which they worshipped—as an historic fact, apart from symbolic meaning. But this is such a minor matter, and the concluding hint of your letter contains so much of value to me, that I am not sorry you misapprehended me. Of course I am quite aware that it is impossible to answer openly—indeed impossible to ask openly—deeper matters in a letter. But that is not requisite in my case. It is enough that my gaze should be set in the necessary direction; the rest may be safely left to the practised fixity of my looking. Indicative longings such as you employed in your letter, you may safely trust me to understand. With regard to what you say about the symbolism of the North, I had substantially discerned it for myself. Indeed it formed part of a little essay already written. It will be none the worse for the corroboration of your remarks; there is always something in your way of stating even what

[1] See Thompson's "The Newer Eve," or "After Woman," with whom the world should rise instead of fall.

is already to me a *res visa*, which adds sight to my seeing. The quotation from the Psalms is new and grateful to me. But I was aware of the thing to which it points. Shakespeare speaks of 'the lordly monarch of the North' (I was confusing it with a passage in *Comus*), and Butler remarks—

> Cardan believed great states depend
> Upon the tip o' the Bear's tail's end.

"Set was given by the Egyptians the lordship of temporal powers; and of course I am aware of the esoteric meaning of this and of Cardan's saying—indeed this was what I intended by my observation that I surmised our Northern aspect in reckoning the compass to be a relic of Set-worship among our Teuton ancestors; though of course I was aware that Set, by that name, was an Egyptian deity.

"Also I am familiar with the principle and significance in this and mythological imagery generally. Indeed, without the knowledge of this principle both Scripture and the mythologies are full of baffling contradictions. When I began seriously to consider mythologies comparatively, I cut myself with the broken reed on which all the 'scientific' students fall back—this significance belongs to an earlier, that to a later, development. But having eyes which 'scientific' students have not, I soon saw that fact gave me the lie in all directions. And when I came to make a comprehensive study of the Hebrew prophets, with the Eastern mythologies in mind, I speedily discovered the systematic use of the dual significance, and the difficulty vanished."

From Coventry Patmore comes the last word:—

"Thank you for your very interesting letter, which shows me how extraordinarily alike are our methods of and experience in contemplation. God bless and help you to bear your crown of thorns, and to prosper in the great, though possibly obscure, career He seems to have marked out for you! My work, such as it is, is done, and I am now only waiting, somewhat impatiently, for death, and the fulfilment of the promises of God, which include all that we have ever desired here, in perfection beyond all hope."

CHAPTER X

MYSTICISM AND IMAGINATION

POEMS of "Sight and Insight," the first section of the new book, were to have been called "Mystical Poems." But the adjective was, in the event, abandoned. As Catholic and thinker, he feared a label which means anything from a mist to a mystification, or something darker than either. His school was of light, as the other was of shadow. Thus Maeterlinck, on Arthur Symons's page of approval, is bidden take his place in the gloomy company of modern mystics. "He has realised how immeasurable is the darkness out of which he has just stepped, and the darkness into which we are about to pass. And he has realised how the thought and sense of that twofold darkness invades the little space of light, in which, for a moment, we move; the depth in which they shadow our steps, even in that moment's partial escape." Catholic mysticism insists, in opposition, upon an exterior radiance trailing clouds of glory across a world that is in shadow.

Apart altogether from Maeterlinck's merits, his commentator's insistence illustrates the temper of the Nineties. It is mainly the artistic value of his mystic's sense of mystery that appeals to Mr. Symons. The void, like the sheet-iron which makes stage thunder, has specific uses; chunks out of the abyss make his scenery; for his most effective dialogue he borrows

largely from silence. Darkness is the stronghold of such interesting emotions as terror—" fear shivers through these plays." " The mystic, let it be remembered, has nothing in common with the moralist," asserts Mr. Symons; on the contrary, Francis Thompson's nearest exponent used the definition, " Mysticism is morality carried to the n^{th} power."

Thompson's wariness about the word marks his respect for it. Joan, the hearer of voices, required a clear head when she stood her trial among the theologians. Nor was the poet beguiled into the unorthodox. Compared with Meredith's philosophy—an illumination, it is true, but such illumination as candles would give in his own draughty woods of Westermain—Thompson's authority is steady as the sheltered lamp of the sanctuary. For Thompson religion was never confusion; his mysteries blurred none of the common issues; they were packed as carefully as another man's title-deeds; they were, he would have claimed, tied with red tape, cut from the cloth of the College of Cardinals. " He is," said Patmore, " of all men I have known most naturally a Catholic. My Catholicism was acquired, his inherent."

Thompson carried his demand for clarity of thought and intention, if not always of diction, to great lengths. " A little common-sense," he once wrote at a time of slight misunderstanding, " is the best remedy—and I at least mean to have it "—a brave vaunt for a poet, but one which he made over and over again in regard to various aspects of the poetic character:—

" There is something wanting in genius when it does not show a clear and strong vein of common-sense. . . .

Dante, indeed, is a perfect rebuke to those who suppose that mystical genius, at any rate, must be dissociated from common-sense. Every such poet should be able to give a clear and logical prose résumé of his teaching, as terse as a page of scholastic philosophy."

Mysticism, as he knew it, " is morality carried to the n^{th} power." Mysticism—" rational mysticism " —has been defined as " an endeavour to find God at first hand, experimentally, in the soul herself independently of all historical and philosophical presuppositions." But Von Hügel condemns the mysticism that is self-sufficient; the constitutional and traditional factors are essential to the Church. And the religion of the Church is not, firstly, an affair between the God and the man, but an affair between God and Man; is not an affair of the heart, but an affair of Love; not an affair of the brain, but of Mind.

That " to the Poet life is full of visions, to the Mystic it is one vision "[1] was the double rule of Francis Thompson's practice. Having regarded the visions and set them down, he would, in another capacity, call them in. The Vision enfolded them all. Thus, not long after it was written, he cancels even the " Orient Ode," and recants " his bright sciential idolatry," even though he had religiously adapted it to the greater glory of God before it was half confessed. " The Anthem of Earth " and the " Ode to the Setting Sun " would also come under the censorship of his anxious orthodoxy, to be in part condemned. What profiteth it a man, he asks in effect, if he gain the whole sun but lose the true Orient—Christ ?

[1] Professor Albert Cock in the *Dublin Review*.

"There is one reason for human confusion which is nearly always ignored. The world—the universe—is a fallen world. . . . That *should* be precisely the function of poetry—to see and restore the Divine idea of things, freed from the disfiguring accidents of their Fall—that is what the Ideal really is, or *should* be. . . . But of how many poets can this truly be said? That gift also is among the countless gifts we waste and pervert; and surely not the least heavy we must render is the account of its stewardship."

He came, even to the point of silence in certain moods, to feel the futility of all writings save such as were explicitly a confession of faith, and also of faithfulness to the institutional side of religion—the Church and the organised means of grace.

The poet is a priest who has no menial and earthly service. He has no parish to reconcile with paradise, no spire that must reach heaven from suburban foundations. The priest puts his very hand to the task of uniting the rational and communal factors of religion with the mystical. The altar-rail is the sudden and meagre boundary-line between two worlds; he holds in his hand a Birmingham monstrance, and the monstrance holds the Host. He has no time to shake the dust of the street from his shoes before he treads the sanctuary. His symbolism is put to the wear and tear of daily use. As a middle-man in the commerce of souls, as the servant of the rational sides of the Church, tried by the forlorn circumstances of never-ceasing work, he may find himself shut out from the more purely mystical regions of his communion. To correct or amplify his religious experience, there are the enclosed Orders, the contemplatives of the Church. But to them, too, there must be complementary religious

experience. They notch off the sum or score of the Church's experience, so that it may never be allowed to recede. It is left to the poet to prophesy or spy upon the increase of Wisdom and the multiplication of the Word. He, too, in so far as he writes, is circumscribed by the uses of the world. The priest's ministry in infinitudes is bounded by his parish; the poet's by his language. And if religion is rightly defined as something more than communion between the man and the Almighty, as being besides the communion between man and man, and the sum of Mankind and the Almighty, then the poet is the immediate servant of God and Man.

Transfiguration is for Thompson the most familiar of mysteries. Good faith needs no Burning Bush. Or, rather, for the faithful every bush is alight. For this faithful poet the seasons were full of the promise of Resurrection. In spring he calls:—

> Hark to the *Jubilate* of the bird
> For them that found the dying way to life!

The rebirth of the earth after winter is the figure of the future life:—

> Thou wak'st, O Earth,
> And work'st from change to change and birth to birth
> Creation old as hope, and new as sight,

and—

> All the springs are flash-lights of one Spring.

In the same poem he is seen at his daily business, the routine work of co-ordinating and synthesising. Light—the light of the sun—is also

> Light to the sentient closeness of the breast,
> Light to the secret chambers of the brain!

Arguments that go from heaven downwards are the commonplaces of his poetry; that he was ready to prove the sum of his wisdom from earth upwards is told in a passage of his prose:—

"If the Trinity were not revealed, I should nevertheless be induced to suspect the existence of such a master-key by the trinities through which expounds itself the spirit of man. Such a trinity is the trinity of beauty—Poetry, Art, Music. Although its office is to create beauty I call it the trinity of beauty, because it is the property of earthly as of the heavenly beauty to create everything to its own image and likeness. Painting is the eye of Passion, Poetry is the voice of Passion, Music is the throbbing of her heart. For all beauty is passionate, though it be a passionless passion. . . . Absolutely are these three the distinct manifestations of a single essence."

He had found another analogy in Pico della Mirandola. "To be the poet of the return to Nature," he says, "is somewhat; but I would be the poet of the return to God." He was the accuser of Nature. He did not say

> By Grace divine,
> Not otherwise, O Nature! are we thine,

but rather that, by divine Grace, Nature may be Man's, that he can go through it to his desire. "Shut the gates of it and it is a cruel and obdurate abundance of clay, of earthworks. Nature has no heart. . . . Did I go up to yonder hill," he writes, "and behold at my feet the spacious amphitheatre of hill-girt wood and mead, overhead the mighty aerial *velarium*, I should feel that my human sadness was a higher and deeper and wider thing than all." "The Hound of Heaven" echoes the

inadequacy of Nature. He quotes Coleridge, who, he says, speaks "not as Wordsworth had taught him to speak, but from his own bitter experience":—

> O Lady, we receive but what we give,
> And in our life alone doth Nature live;
> Ours is her wedding garment, ours her shroud!
> I may not hope from outward forms to win
> The glory and the joy whose fountains are within.

It is at this point that he strides from his fellows, draws away from the Pantheist and the Pagan. Coleridge's words are true of Nature's relation to ourselves—not the truth with regard to Nature absolutely:

"Absolute Nature lives not in our life, nor yet is lifeless, but lives in the life of God; and in so far, and so far merely, as man himself lives in that life, does he come into sympathy with Nature, and Nature with him. She is God's daughter who stretches her hand only to her Father's friends. Not Shelley, not Wordsworth himself, ever drew so close to the heart of Nature as did the Seraph of Assisi, who was close to the Heart of God."

There, again, the complete reasonableness and sincerity of his poetry is put to the test of his prose. He continues:—

"Yet higher, yet further let us go. Is this daughter of God mortal? can her foot not pass the grave? Is Nature, as men tell us,

> . . . a fold
> Of Heaven and earth across His Face,

which we must rend to behold that Face? Do our eyes indeed close for ever on the beauty of earth when they open on the beauty of Heaven? I think not so; I would fain beguile even death itself with a sweet fantasy. . . . I believe that in Heaven is earth. Plato's doctrine of Ideals, as I conceive, laid its hand upon the very breast of truth,

yet missed her breathing. For beauty—such is my faith—is beauty for eternity."

The faith of " In Heaven is Earth " is but a tentative expression of his later gospel. At first he had been alarmed at the theory—in the form in which it had reached him—of the survival of earthly love in Heaven. At every turn he is the devoted, intentest, faithfullest interpreter of the material world. All his " copy " awaited him in Nature; his translations from her tangible writings bear on every page the *imprimatur* of his faith. The generality of the revelation made to them did not spoil his appetite nor blur his surprising genius for detail. His couplings of the great and the small, not always so sweetly reasonable as that set between the flower and the star, sometimes need apology. The whole scale of comparisons is unexpected in the case of one who goes to the eating-house not only for his meals, but for his images; who finds nothing outrageous in naming the Milky Way a beaten yolk of stars; who takes the setting sun for a bee that stings the West to angry red; and, when he would express the effect of an oppressive sunset upon Tom o' Bedlam's eye, who casts about in the lumber-room of memory which had been filled with oppressive images during nights endured in a common lodging-house.

Even then he was only expressing, out of a set of accidental impressions, the poet's unremitting desire to link up the sights and sensations of the universe. Drummond of Hawthornden's

> Night like a drunkard reels
> Beyond the hills

may serve as a typical instance of such arbitrary similes.

In the note-books I find unpublished lines that are quotable for biographical rather than literary interest:—

Dost thou perceive no God within the frog ?
O poor, poor Soul !
Bristles and rankness only in the hog ?
O wretched dole !
No wry'd beneficence in the fever's germ ?
Nor any Heaven shut within the worm ?
Dost shudder daintily
At words, in song, shaped so un-lovelily ?
To school, to school !
For does it to thee seem
That God in an ill dream
Fashioned the twisted horrors of the standing pool ?

Mr. Chesterton surmises the mountainous significance of minute things. In *Tremendous Trifles*, like the lover who writes an ode to his lady's eyebrow, or the professor who gives his life to the study of the capillary glands, he delights in disproportion. When Mr. Chesterton planned a volume of poems on the things in his pocket, but desisted because the volume would have bulked too large, he was only formulating, in a manner acceptable to the man who puts his hand in his pocket for a halfpenny, the old " religio poetae." The things of the pocket constitute a pocket dictionary in more than two languages, a book of synonyms, a lexicon filled with cross references, all based upon the Word. The silly silver of men's purses is blessed, and every mortal thing assists in immortal liturgy. St Charles was of one mind with those who sing the *Magnificat* of trifles. When asked how he would die, he answered: " Playing cards, as I now do, if it should so chance." Whenever such an one dies he holds

trumps. And like the priest, the poet touches mysteries with his very hand; he makes daily communion. "To some," says Patmore, "there is revealed a sacrament greater than that of the Real Presence, a sacrament of the Manifest Presence, which is, and is more than, the sum of all the sacraments." And again we have Thompson's own

> In thee, Queen, man is saturate with God.

The Psalmist is with him:—

> "If I climb up into heaven thou art there, if I go down into hell, thou art there also. If I take the wings of the morning and remain in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there also shall thy hand lead me and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say peradventure the darkness shall cover me, then shall my night be turned into day; the darkness and light to thee are both alike."

Thompson's own

> . . . Nay, I affirm
> Nature is whole in her least things exprest

is a splendid justification of the poet's dalliance with trifles. Vaughan confines Eternity in the scope of a night, a ring—nay, a couplet:—

> I saw Eternity the other night,
> Like a great ring of pure and endless light.

In a couplet, or a letter, literature performs her miracles. Christina Rossetti told Katharine Tynan that she never stepped on a scrap of torn paper, but lifted it out of the mud lest perhaps it should have the Holy Name written or printed upon it. That is an attitude towards literature, towards words and the Word, not unlike Francis Thompson's.

In the " Orient Ode " he has addressed the sun:—

Not unto thee, great Image, not to thee
Did the wise heathen bend an idle knee;
And in an age of faith grown frore
If I too shall adore,
Be it accounted unto me
A bright sciential idolatry!
God has given thee visible thunders
To utter thine apocalypse of wonders;
And what want I of prophecy,
That, at the sounding from thy station
Of thy flagrant trumpet, see
The seals that melt, the open revelation?
Or who a God-persuading angel needs,
That only heeds
The rhetoric of thy burning deeds?

. . . . . .

Lo, of thy Magians I the least
Haste with my gold, my incenses and myrrhs,
To thy desired epiphany, from the spiced
Regions and odorous of Song's traded East.
Thou, for the life of all that live
The victim daily born and sacrificed;
To whom the pinion of this longing verse
Beats but with fire which first thyself did give,
To thee, O Sun—or is't perchance, to Christ?

Ay, if men say that on all high heaven's face
The saintly signs I trace
Which round my stolèd altars hold their solemn place,
Amen, amen! For oh, how could it be,—
When I with wingèd feet had run
Through all the windy earth about,
Quested its secret of the sun,
And heard what thing the stars together shout,—
I should not heed thereout
Consenting counsel won:—
" By this, O Singer, know we if thou see.

When men shall say to thee: Lo ! Christ is here,
When men shall say to thee: Lo ! Christ is there,
Believe them: yea, and this—then art thou seer,
When all thy crying clear
Is but: Lo here ! lo there !—ah me, lo everywhere !"

Nature's shrines he had visited, but unavailingly:—

Nature, poor stepdame, cannot slake my drouth.

He cries to the sun:—

I know not what strange passion bows my head
To thee, whose great command upon my veins
Proves thee a god for me not dead, not dead !

He cries it to the sun, but only in the prelude to an ode that ends with the Cross. His songs of Nature are

Sweet with wild wings that pass, that pass away.

All his wild things passed, that they might be garnered in heaven. The chase of the " Hound of Heaven " ends in a divine embrace; like that ending is the ending of all his verse.

He would not have his harmonies mistaken for the repetition of " fair ancient flatteries." He takes the sun, at rising and at setting, as " a type memorial "[1]:—

Like Him thou hang'st in dreadful pomp of blood
Upon thy Western rood;
And His stained brow did vail like thine to-night,
Yet lift once more Its light,
And, risen, again departed from our ball,
But when It set on earth arose in Heaven.

[1] He had a theory of the solar existence that did not stop short, with Science, at the measurement of gases and their density. " It has," Mr. Ghosh tells me he said, " a life of its own, analogous to the life of the heart, periodic in its manifestations and——," but here Francis stopped. " To Western ears it will sound

And in the After-Strain:—

Even so, O Cross ! thine is the victory.
  Thy roots are fast within our fairest fields;
Brightness may emanate in Heaven from thee,
  Here thy dread symbol only shadow yields.

Of reapèd joys thou art the heavy sheaf
  Which must be lifted, though the reaper groan;
Yea, we may cry till Heaven's great ear be deaf,
  But we must bear thee, and must bear alone.

Vain were a Simon; of the Antipodes
  Our night not borrows the superfluous day.
Yet woe to him that from his burden flees,
  Crushed in the fall of what he cast away.[1]

The Cross spread its arms across his world. It was never heavier on his shoulder than when he copied out Donne's lines:—

Who can deny me power and liberty
To stretch mine arms and mine own cross to be ?
Swim, and at every stroke thou art thy cross:
The mast and yard make one where seas do toss.
Look down, thou spiest our crosses in small things,
Look up, thou seest birds raised on crossèd wings.

---

ridiculous," he said, and was silent. In vain Mr. Sarath Kumar Ghosh asserted his own Eastern aptitude for such speculation. Francis grimly repeated his excommunication, and Mr. Ghosh, conscious of a frock-coat and a great command of the English idiom, was half-convinced of its justness.

[1] Compare Donne's " No cross is so extreme, as to have none " —a thought upon which many paradoxical couplets were turned in the seventeenth century. But Donne goes a little further than his fellows. He seems to have known that an image, bound up with its original, is more than a likeness:—

Let crosses so take what hid Christ in thee;
And be His image, or not His, but He.

Donne had encouraged him in his own early search for its symbols. In a prayer to the Blessed Virgin Thompson speaks of the general crucifixion of man:—

> O thou, who standest as thou hast ever stood
> Beside the Cross, when as it shall be said—
> " It is consummated,"
> Receive us, taken from the World's rough wood !

But Donne's image is the more immediate; and the " Veneration of Images," of another poet, in which man is addressed as—

> Thou Rood of every day—

confirms both their guesses.

In "Form and Formalism" Thompson says:—

" No common aim can triumph, till it is crystallised in an individual. Man himself must become incarnate in a man before his cause can triumph. Thus the universal Word became the individual Christ; that total God and total man being particularised in a single symbol, the cause of God and man might triumph. In Christ, therefore, centres and is solved that supreme problem of life—the marriage of the Unit with the Sum. In Him is perfectly shown forth the All for one, and One for all, which is the justificatory essence of that substance we call Kingship. . . . When the new heavens and the new earth, which multitudinous Titans are so restlessly forging, at length stand visible to resting man, it needs no prophecy to foretell that they will be like the old, with head, and form, and hierarchic memberment, as the six-foot bracken is like the bracken at your knee. For out of all its disintegrations and confusion earth emerges, like a strong though buffeted swimmer, nearer to the unseen model and term of all social growth; which is the civil constitution of angeldom, and the Uranian statecraft of imperatorial God."

* * * * *

"Ritual is poetry addressed to the eye," he notes. The corollary of which supports his belief that poetry was an affair of ritual—or images.

Imagination is the sense or science that discovers identities and correspondences, while fancy takes a lower place because, said Thompson, it discovers only likenesses. Imagination discerns similarity rooted or enskied; it is the origin of the symbolism that may be traced back to the heart of the truths and mysteries to which it supplies the outward shows. Imagination is the spring; Symbolism is here the manifestation of Imagination, is the identity-bearer, partaking of the very essence of the Divinity. The Symbols of Divinity are Divine; flesh is the Word made flesh; the Eucharist is the true Presence; and Christ is Himself the Way to Christ. Thompson's poetry and theology abode by the Image; it was no necessity of their nature to penetrate beyond the barriers of expression and revelation. The go-betweens of others were his essentials. Holding so grave an estimate of the functions of the imagination, he found in poetry the highest human scope and motive.

Images enlarge and qualify; they create, too, in so far as they bear and nourish thoughts that can only be expressed through them. They belong, he maintained, to the highest poetry, the poetry of revelation and the intellect. In this idea he was fixed; for its sake he surmounted the opposition of the thinker in poetry to whom he was most dutiful in admiration. Thus A. M. in the *Nation*, November 23, 1907:—

"Imagery is not, it may be held, the last, or inmost, word of poetry. There is a simplicity on the yonder side. The

simplicity of the hither side may be natural and pleasing enough, though it may also be ' natural ' as is the village fool. But the simplicity of the further poetry is a plainness within those splendid outer courts of approach where imagery celebrates ritual and ceremony. A few poems abide in that further place—a further place, did we call it? It is far, indeed, from the access of the suitor, but closest of all things to the warm breast of the very Muse. Francis Thompson dealt almost altogether in imagery; and it is because of this that his less sympathetic readers accuse him of a lack of simplicity. And he himself, in a manuscript note, says: ' Imagery is so far from being " all fancy " (which is what people mean by saying it is " all imagination ") that the deepest truths—even in the natural or physical order—are often adumbrated only by images familiar, and yet conceived to be purely fanciful analogies. . . .' No ' lack ' was among his faults. Where he might be charged or questioned was in his commission, not in his omission —his commission of the splendid fault of excess. How many poets might be furnished, not from the abundance, but from the over-abundance, of his imagery, and the prunings and the chastenings of his ' fancy.' The spoils of such a correction as would have made a few of his odes more ' classical ' might have been gathered up, a golden armful, by poets who need have stooped for nothing else, twelve basketsful of fragments, after the feeding of a chosen multitude."

Thompson had intended to show in an essay that symbolism is no arbitrary convention. He bids himself expound its elements by leading examples, and, had he done so, we should have known more of the geography of that region where symbols and their principles are merged. " All things linkèd are "; the daisy is the signature of the star; for the poet all terrestrial minutiae were signed, nay, scribbled all over with reference marks and sealed with the likeness of

larger things. From an old commentator on St Thomas Aquinas, he copied:—

"The angelic intellect contains the things which belong to universal nature, and those also which are the principles of individuation, knowing by science divinely infused, not only what belongs to universal nature, but also individualities of things, inasmuch as these all form multiplied representation of the one Simple Essence of God."

The ancient school of Herbalists believed that natural remedies were stamped with the likeness of the parts to which they would bring healing, as walnuts, which, because they "have the perfect signature of the head, are profitable to the brain." Poisons show something like contrition by taking to themselves colours and odours plainly evil; vipers, as proper scholars of the alphabet, wear V for venom on their heads. The Herbalists took the narrowing road, from vision down to practice. They pounded their discoveries to powder with the bald-head pestle of literalness. The mortar of the herbalist is the chalice of the poet. It is the difference again between illusion and imagination, or, as Blake figured them, between Adam and Christ.

Blake's conception of the identity of and correspondence between the Complete or Divine Mind and Humanity led him to further definitions which are of weight in general consideration of the poetry of imagination. Our world, he held, was a contraction of our mind from the mind of God of which it is a part. To illusion—the perception and acceptance of the erroneous deductions of the contracted personality, or Adam—he gave the name Satan. "Besides Perception,"

(here I have recourse verbatim to Edwin J. Ellis's useful disquisition), "always tempting us to error, by leading through narrow to mistaken personality, there is ' imagination,' always inviting us to truth."

In all the poetry belonging to the period of " The Mistress of Vision " Patmore is the master of vision. He leads the way to " deific peaks " and " conquered skies," the Virgil of a younger Dante. Their thoughts chimed to the same stroke of metre and rhyme; for each of the mystical poems may be found kindred suggestions in Patmore.

His " Hate pleasure, if only because this is the only means of obtaining it " is the root paradox of the many found in Thompson's lines beginning— " Lose, that the lost thou may'st receive," and the rest.

But go through the whole of the two poets, and even while recognising the twin enterprises of imagination you will end in the enjoyment of their dissimilarity. Patmore himself has quoted St Paul— " Let each man abound in his own sense."

Patmore may have given Thompson a metre and a score of thoughts, but above everything else he gave him the freedom of his imagination. Having led him to a point of vantage, he looked in the same direction, but the revelation varied as the view varies to two men who walk along a road towards the same sunset. They are a few paces apart; to one an intervening tree may be black and sombre, to the other streaked with fire. The height they reached may have been the same, but the dread of height was to each a thing of his own.

Reservation

From Patmore, August 1895:—"I see, with joy, how nearly we are upon the same lines, but our visions could not be true were they quite the same; and no one can really see anything but his own vision." "The Mistress of Vision" Francis described by as "a phantasy with no more than an illusive tinge of psychic significance." It is a masque in which he and his Muse observe the formalities of dialogue; but before the poem is finished the truth is out; as when, dawn breaking upon dancing lovers, their steps cease, and for a moment their embrace is real. So in the poem: the phantasy is not maintained; the masque is up. Christ, before one is aware, is treading the land of Luthany, is walking on the waters. Following, in carefully considered sequence, is "Contemplation," and, afterward, the true fruits of *The Unknown Eros*. "I felt my instrument yet too imperfect to profane by it the highest ranges of mysticism," he had said, and, in "The Mistress of Vision," "The Dread of Height," and particularly in "The Orient Ode," something is withheld. As the rood-screen shields the altar, language screens revelation.

Although the spirit of reservation in the literature of religious experience has apology in the saying that they who know God best do not seek to define Him, that is not the leading argument for reticence. Beyond that, they recognised truths "which it is not lawful to utter," but knew that the poet may express them in ways that shade them to the eye, or make them invisible as the too-bright disc of the sun. Sufficient rays may pass through cloudy speech to diffuse life-sufficing warmth. "See that thou tell no man" is an injunction

of which the poets keep the letter but break the spirit. F. T. writes in a review of a paper on St Clement:—

"Not only among the Hebrews, but among the Egyptians and Greeks, prophecies and oracles were delivered under enigmas. The Egyptian hieroglyphics, the apothegms of the wise men of Greece, are instances of the practice of throwing a kind of veil around important truths in order that the curiosity of men may be aroused and their diligence stimulated. All who treated of divine things, whether Greeks or Barbarians, concealed the principles. . . . Whatever has a veil of mystery thrown around it, causes the truth to appear more grand and awful."

St Clement speaks of an *unwritten* tradition of blessed doctrine, handed down from SS Peter, James, John, and Paul, but not to be broadcasted any more than a sword should be placed in the hand of a child. Thompson dwells also on St Paul's unspoken message, which, designated by the name of *wisdom*, he withheld from many of the Corinthians because they were not fit to hear it. He communicated it to the *spiritual* not to the *animal* man. Origen says that that which St Paul would have called *wisdom* is found in the "Canticle of Canticles." Thompson dwells further on the hidden meanings of the Pentateuch, believing that there was "an inexhaustible treasure of divine wisdom concealed under the letter of Holy Writ." Thompson saw wise men whispering, and guessed that there were secrets; their presence discovered, they were open secrets for such as he. "You have but to direct my sight, and the intentness of my gaze will discover the rest." Of the poet who is religious it may be said: "There hath drawn near a man to a deep heart, that is, a secret heart." It must be remembered that the

greater part of this poet's seeming reservations are only such as exist between the Church and the outer world. For instance:—

"The personal embrace between Creator and creature is so solely the secret and note of Catholicism, that its language to the outer sects is unintelligible—the strange bruit of inapprehensible myth."

During walks at Pantasaph and Lymington, Thompson penetrated on the one hand to places where thought is singed and scorched, on the other to healing regions of light; at one time deep in melancholy, at another buoyantly content. My mother said that during certain drives with Coventry Patmore he would sit looking at the floor of the carriage with the harrowing expression that one gathers from Rossetti's "Wood Spurge." It is a commonplace of the mystics that contemplation is painful. St John of the Cross's warning of the desolation that follows the dwelling in the neutral land between the temporal and the spiritual is one of many.

There is no escape. Conscience is another name for consciousness. "If men understood clearly they would sin at every step, wherefore they understand grossly, that sin may not be imputed to them," he wrote, half protesting against the disabilities of clear understanding. And again: "Life is an Inkermann, fought in the mist. If men saw clearly, they would despair to fight. Wherefore the Almighty opens the eyes only of those whom He has led by special ways of gradual inurement and preparation."

The futility of Francis's conversational repetition was a byword; but when he said a thing twice in verse or prose it probably mattered more than most other

things. " The Dread of Height " states the burden of knowledge, and John ix 41, quoted as the poem's motto, is made to enforce it too: "If ye were blind ye should have no sin; but now ye say We see, your sin remaineth." What John said (here or elsewhere) he would generally have thought sufficiently said. But in this matter he repeats John, and then more than once repeats himself.

A man does not, because he is as conscious of his God as were the disciples who really had Him on the road to Emmaus, find the road an easy one. Bunyan holds good; the better way is the roughest. The more excellent landscape is that which is seen against the sun. But it is rigid in its splendours; every cock of hay, every clod, is a shadow. Is the ear that hears " the winds their Maker magnify " happier than that which can note only rattling of windows and the cracking of boughs ? During sound perhaps, not certainly during pauses in sound:—

" I never found any so religious and devout, that he had not sometimes a withdrawing of grace. There was never Saint so highly rapt and illuminated, who before or after was not tempted. For he is not worthy of the high contemplation of God who has not been troubled with some tribulations for God's sake." The commonplaces of the *Imitation* are common sense. " Thou visitest him early in the morning; and suddenly Thou provest him."

I do think my tread,
Stirring the blossom in the meadow-grass,
Flickers the unwithering stars.

Such treading may be better than the asphalt of every day, but it is not easy going. Of futurity he wrote in a letter to my mother:—

"You must know this thing of me already, having read those Manning verses,[1] which I do not like to read again. You know that I believe in eternal punishment: you know that, when my dark hour is on me, this individual terror is the most monstrous of all that haunt me. But it is individual. For others—even if the darker view were true, the fewness is relative to the total mass of mankind, not absolute; while I myself refuse to found upon so doubtful a thing as a few scattered texts a tremendous prejudgment which has behind it no consentaneous voice of the Church. And I do firmly believe that none are lost who have not wilfully closed their eyes to the known light: that such as fall with constant striving, battling with their temperament, or through ill-training circumstance which shuts them from true light, &c.—that all these shall taste of God's justice, which for them is better than man's mercy. But if you would see the present state of my convictions on the subject turn to the new Epilogue of my 'Judgment in Heaven' (you will find it in the wooden box)."

His correspondent has written:—

"As a thinker, Francis Thompson is profoundly meditative, and, if pessimistic, then pessimistic with submission and fear, not with revolt. His thought must not be called gloomy, even when it is dark as night, for in the darkness there is a sense of open and heavenly air."

The most natural thing in the world was that the singer of the Church—the Church that defined the Immaculate Conception—should be a poet of womankind—one of the Marians. Seminary training, however, had not prepared him for a world of women. A note

[1] "The Dead Cardinal of Westminster."

on the Marriage of Cana, which proves, he avers, that "much wine is needed before a man may go through with matrimony," is characteristic of his schooling. In humour the schooling lasted when all else had been outlived. His unpublished comedy "Man Proposes, Woman Disposes" is full of ready-made gibes, and his "Dress," printed in a weekly paper, is threadbare comic verse on a subject he treated reverently enough when there was no joke to crack. It is still, perhaps, as the seminarist that he notes: "In Burmah the monks complain that women are natively incapable of any true understanding of religion." But it is a later Thompson who adds the comment: "The heart of woman is the citadel, the *ultimum refugium* of true religiosity." Genesis gives him the heading for several pages of a note-book devoted to such subjects: "I will put enmity between thee and the woman."

Rod, Root, and Flower set him to work in the same nursery-garden. His note-books reflect Patmore's aphoristic habit. He himself defended or denied the "fragmentary" nature of Patmore's book. "It might as will be said that the heavens are fragmentary, because the stars are not linked by golden chains." But he himself could hardly have fitted his scattered notes on Woman into any satisfactory sequence. In a notebook I find:—

"The function of natural love is to create a craving which it cannot satisfy. And then only has its water been tasted in perfect purity, if it awakens an insatiate thirst of wine." His hope is made known in his poetry:—

> The Woman I behold, whose vision seek
> All eyes and know not; t'ward whom climb
> The steps of the world, and beats all wing of rhyme.

And his prose:—

"When the federation of the world comes (as come I believe it will) it can only be federation in both government and religion of plenary and ordered dominance. I see only two religions constant enough to effect this: each based upon the past—which is stability; each growing according to an interior law—which is strength. Paganism and Christianism; the religion of the Queen of Heaven who is Astarte, and of the Queen of Heaven who is Mary." ("We offer sacrifice to the Queen of Heaven"—Jer. xliv 19).

Once he turns the subject with a stock phrase of playfulness—

> Daughter of the ancient Eve,
> We know the gifts ye gave—and give.
> Who knows the gifts which *you* shall give,
> Daughter of the newer Eve?
> You, if my soul be augur, you
> Shall—O what shall you not, Sweet, do?

But before he is through with the poem he is led to greater explicitness, and, finally, to the solemn manner of concealment—

> When to love *you* is (O Christ's spouse!)
> To love the beauty of His house;
> Then come the Isaian days; the old
> Shall dream; and our young men behold
> Vision—yea, the vision of Thabor-mount,
> Which none to other shall recount,
> Because in all men's hearts shall be
> The seeing and the prophecy.
> For ended is the Mystery Play,
> When Christ is life, and you the way;
> When Egypt's spoils are Israel's right,
> And Day fulfils the married arms of Night.

But here my lips are still.
Until
You and the hour shall be revealed,
This song is sung and sung not, and its words are sealed.

In thee, Queen, man is saturate with God.
Blest period
To God's redeeming sentence. So in thee
Mercy at length is uttered utterly.

In human passion, as in sun-worship, he relates everything to the Deity. It is within forbidden degrees if it cannot be referred back to Divine Love. His series "A Narrow Vessel," he describes as "being a little dramatic sequence on the aspect of primitive girl-nature towards a love beyond its capacities." Opening with a "rape of the lock," the whole breadth of the centuries and of the human mind apart from Pope's, the girl bemoans the gift of her hair:—

My lock the enforcèd steel did grate
To cut; its root-thrills came
Down to my bosom. It might sate
His lust for my poor shame.

Here is unwonted attention to the minutiae of sensation; and the third poem of the second series is the one that comes nearest in all Thompson's work to the many love poems of the many modern poetry-books. The likeness is startling. It is the only poem of his which the illustrators of "Tennyson" of 1857 would have relished to put upon wood. The girl was an actual girl named Maggie Bryan, of the Welsh village; his photograph was long kept in her narrow room, and her grave, made in the October following the poet's death, is near the scene of that love-making that was so in-

congruous and timid that it had little real existence in word or look. " Love Declared," the poem that sinks to the commoner level of love-poetry, is fiction and reads like it; the rest reality—only a little more than the reality.

But Thompson did not leave it at reality. No sooner has an unwary reader, who, on other pages, had been clutching at his poet, made sure, on this page, of his man, than the creature of bone and muscle slips from him. The sequence, it is confessed in the last poem, is written solely in the interests of allegory. Here for once is actuality, one had said; but only to learn that no actuality bulks so large for the poet himself as the actuality of religious speculation. His own Pantasaph drama, a thing that passed in the high-street, hemmed in by cottages, noted by gossipers, with strong hill winds blowing in the faces of the actors, was most personal to the hero for its allegorical meaning. He asks:—

" How many have grasped the significance of my sequence, *A Narrow Vessel?* Critics either overlooked it altogether or adverted to it as trivial and disconnected. One, who prized it, and wished I had always written as humanly, grieved that the epilogue turned it into an unreal allegory. He could not understand that all human love was to me a symbol of divine love; nay, that human love was in my eyes a piteous failure unless as an image of the supreme Love which gave meaning and reality to its seeming insanity. The lesson of that sequence is just this. Woman repels the great and pure love of man in proportion to its purity. This is due to an instinct which she lacks the habits and power to analyse, that the love of the pure and lofty lover is so deep, so vast in its withheld emotion, as her entire self would be unable to pay back. Though she cast her whole self down that eager gulf, it would disappear as a water-drop in the

ocean. And though the lover ask no more than her little tremulous self may think fit to give, she feels that so vast a love claims of right and equity her total surrender. Though the lover be generously unexacting, that wonderful gift, she feels, exacts no less than all, and then she cannot with her entire potency and abandonment of love adequate the hungry immensity poured around it. So, with instinctive fear, she recoils from a love which her all cannot equal. Though the lover asks no more than she please to give, his love asks her very being, demands a continual upward strain. The narrow vessel dreads to crack under the overflowing love which surges into it. She shrinks with tremor; she turns to the lover whose shallow love has nought to frighten her; she can halt where she pleases, far short of total surrender. It is an easy beginning, which seems to involve so little and involves—how much! For she does not understand that once she begins to love, her nature will not rest short of supreme surrender (I assume an average nature capable of love), and that she will end by wasting her whole self on this thin soil, which will reject and anticipate it (while) she recoiled with dislike and fear from the great love which would have absorbed and repaid it an hundred-fold. Now this is but the image and explanation of the soul's attitude towards only God. The one is illustrated by the other. Though God asks of the soul but to love him what it may, and is ready to give an increased love for a poor little, the soul feels that this infinite love demands naturally its whole self, that if it begin to love God it may not stop short of all it has to yield. It is troubled, even if it did go a brief way, on the upward path; it fears and recoils from the whole great surrender, the constant effort beyond itself which is sensibly laid on it. It falls back with relieved contentment on some human love, a love on its own plane, where somewhat short of total surrender may go to requital, where no upward effort is needful. And it ends by giving for the meanest, the most unsufficing and half-hearted return, that utter self-surrender and self-effacement which it denied to God. Even (how rarely) if the return be such as mortal may

render, how empty and unsatiated it leaves the soul. One always is less generous of love than the other. Now this was the theme and meaning of my sequence. It did not (as it should have done) follow on to the facile welcome of a light love. But that was by implication glanced at in the epilogue, which drew what I have shown to be the real conclusion of the entire study—even to the possible most tragic issue of all, in the soul which has taken the kiss of the Spouse (so to speak) only to fall away from him, ' the heart where good is well perceived and known, yet is not willed.' "

That sequence, he said, was written solely in the interests of allegory. Obviously the episode was not sufficient unto itself. Only once did he know love really sufficient for love poetry.

CHAPTER XI

PATMORE'S DEATH, AND "NEW POEMS"

IN July 1896, the year of his death, Patmore made an offer of service memorable from a man, called arrogant and harsh, to a man who might well, in personal matters, have stirred his prejudices:—

"You were looking so unwell when we parted, that, not having heard from you, I am somewhat alarmed. If, at any time, you find yourself seriously ill, and do not find the attendance, food, &c., sufficiently good, tell me and I will go to Pantasaph to take care of you for any time you might find me useful. It would be a great pleasure and honour to serve you in any way."

Thompson answered:—

". . . You have been most generously kind to me; and I can truly say that I never yet fell from any friend who did not first fall from me. I thank you for the great honour you have done me by your offer to come up and look after me if I needed nursing. Fortunately it has not come to that yet."

Patmore died in November 1896. To Mrs. Patmore Francis wrote:—

"I am shocked and overcome to hear of your—and my—bereavement; there has passed away the greatest genius of the century, and from me a friend whose like I shall not

see again; one so close to my own soul that the distance of years between us was hardly felt, nor could the distance of miles separate us. I had a letter from him but last Monday, and was hoping that I might shortly see him again. Now my hope is turned suddenly into mourning.

"The irrevocableness of such a grief is mocked by many words; these few words least wrong it. My friend is dead, and I had but one such friend.—Yours in all sympathy of sorrow, FRANCIS THOMPSON."

At the same time he wrote to Palace Court:—

"CRECCAS COTTAGE, PANTASAPH.

"DEAR WILFRID,—I send you my lodging account for the last two months.

"Of nothing can I write just now. You know what friends we had been these last two years. And I heard from him but the Monday before his death. There is no more to say, because there is too much more to say. Yours always, FRANCIS THOMPSON."

"A Captain of Song," addressed to Patmore before his death, was published in the *Athenæum*, December 5, 1896. He dropped into private prose to ease his task: "Age alone will grasp in some dim measure what must have been the unmanifested powers of a mind from which could go forth this starry manifestation; and what 'silence full of wonders' interspaced his opulent frugality of speech." "It remains a personal (and wonderful) memory that to me sometimes, athwart the shifting clouds of converse, was revealed by glimpses the direct vision of that oceanic vast of intellect." "The basic silence of our love" and the "under-silence of love" are other phrases that tell of something not to be expressed in the obituary column.

There are scraps, also, of private verse which tell his sorrow:—

> O how I miss you any casual day !
> And as I walk
> Turn, in the customed way,
> Towards you with the talk
> Which who but you should hear ?
> And know the intercepting day
> Betwixt me and your only listening ear;
> And no man ever more my tongue shall hear,
> And dumb amid an alien folk I stray.

He grieved for Patmore as a wife grieves for the husband who dies before the birth of her child. "This latest, highest, of my work," he says of a portion of *New Poems*, "is now born dumb. It had been sung into his sole ears. Now there is none who speaks its language."

The printed dedication to Patmore runs:—

> Lo, my book thinks to look Time's leaguer down,
> Under the banner of your spread renown !
> Or if these levies of impuissant rhyme
> Fall to the overthrow of assaulting Time,
> Yet this one page shall fend oblivion's shame
> Armed with your crested and prevailing name.

The tribute is handsomely conceived without any of the insincerity that cowered behind the handsomeness of eighteenth-century dedications. It was an occasion for setting forth the humility which was a very real part of Thompson's character. In a printed note the author explains: "This dedication was written while the dear friend and great Poet to whom it was addressed yet lived. It is left as he saw it—the last verses of mine that were ever to pass under his eye." To Francis,

A Cancelled Preface

Mrs. Patmore wrote just before the publication of the book: "I see that you have decided to retain the dedication of the poems you are now bringing out to my husband. I cannot resist thanking you and also letting you know how much pleasure the mark of your friendship gave him before he died. He was also looking forward to your visit to him with great delight."

Before the publication of *New Poems* a preface was written and cancelled, and a dozen titles mooted and rejected. In one MS. the name *Poems, Partly Mystical*, is followed by an Introduction:—

"This book represents the work of the three years which have elapsed since my first volume was prepared for the press, my second volume[1] having been a poem of comparatively early date. The first section exhibits mysticism in a limited and varying degree. I feel my instrument yet too imperfect to profane by it the higher ranges. Much is transcendental rather than truly mystic. The opening poem ('The Mistress of Vision') is a fantasy with no more than an illusive tinge of psychic significance. And of the other poems some are as much science as mysticism! but it is the science of the Future, not the science of the scientist. And since the science of the Future is the science of the Past, the outlook on the universe of the 'Orient Ode,' for instance, is nearer the outlook of Ecclesiastes than of, say, Professor Norman Lockyer. The 'Orient Ode,' on its scientific side, must wait at least fifty years for understanding. For there was never yet poet, beyond a certain range of insight, who could not have told the scientists what they will be teaching a hundred years hence. Science is a Caliban, only fit to hew wood and draw water for Prospero; and it is time Ariel were released from his imprisonment by the materialistic Sycorax."[2]

[1] *Sister Songs.*

[2] "Many a bit of true seeing I have had to learn again, through science having sophisticated my eye, inward or outward. And

"New Poems"

In a letter to Patmore he had written: "The bits of science that crop up in your essays remind me of little devils dancing among rose trees." The list of possible titles insists upon his regard for one aspect of his later work: *Songs of the Inner Life; Odes and other Poems; New Things and Old; Songs of a Sun-worshipper; Music of the Future; Night before Light; At the Orient Gates; The Dawn before the Day-Star.* In the event *New Poems* was chosen; and his last letter to W. M. before publication ran:—

"Herewith I send the book. Now, if Alice and you, after you have read it in proof, say 'this is bad poetry,' I will cut out half the book; but not half a line to please a publisher's whim for little books and big margins. I was cabined and confined over my first book; with my spurs won, I should be at liberty to make the book comprehensive. Treated in the sumptuous style, it would make a book about the size of Rossetti's first volume; but there is no reason why it should be got up more than just well and simply. I believe it will be my last volume of poetry—in any case my last for some years—and I am determined to make it complete, that I may feel all my work worth anything is on record for posterity, if I die. . . . I have sacrificed something to the levity of the critics. I have put a whole section of the lightest poems I ever wrote after the first terribly trying section, to soothe the critics' gums. If they are decent to the measure of their slight aim, that is all I care for; they aimed little at poetry. That they are

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many a bit I have preserved, to the avoidance of a world of trouble, by concerning myself no more than any child about the teachings of science. Especially is this the case in regard to light. I never lost the child's instinctive rightness of outlook upon light because I flung the scientific theories aside as so much baffling distortion of perspective. 'Here is cart for horse,' I felt rather than saw, and would nothing with them. . . . Though scientists in camp stand together against me, I would not challenge the consensus of the poets."

true to girl-nature I have a woman's certificate, besides the fact that I studied them—with one exception—from an actual original. . . . Again I have put a batch of four 'simple' poems at the opening of the miscellaneous section to catch the critical eye, though their importance is not such as to give them a place so prominent. So I have done what artifice could do to lighten a very stern, sober, and difficult volume. 'Tis more varied in range than my former work; and by my arrangement I have done my best to emphasise and press into service this, the solitary redeeming fact from the popular standpoint. From the higher standpoint I have gained, I think, in art and chastity of style; but have greatly lost in fire and glow. 'Tis time that I was silent. This book carries me quite as far as my dwindling strength will allow; and if I wrote further in poetry, I should write down my own fame."

New Poems found the critics, in 1897, more hostile than before. Perhaps the *Saturday Review* was the most severe. "These, and the rest, are nonsense-verses," the writer says of "The Mistress of Vision." The *Literary World* sees need of doctoring, saying, "Nothing can be stronger than his language, nothing weaker than the impression it leaves on the mind. . . . It is like a dictionary of obsolete English suffering from a fierce fit of delirium tremens." *The Critic*, of New York, takes Thompson's ignorance of religion and symbolism for granted; *The Times* finds fault with both his poetry and Catholicism; the *Morning Post* is unfavourable; the *Daily Chronicle*, the *Speaker*, and the *Guardian* all begin severely but leave scolding before they ended to give generous praise. The *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* was handsome. The poet's obscurity was the chief cause of displeasure, since from thinking a man's meanings difficult it is fatally easy to go on

to say he is meaningless. The case they make is startlingly good; one reaches for one's Thompson from the shelves to see if he is in truth so secure as one had thought before spending an hour with his early critics. If one pauses before quoting them, it is not for fear of dealing unkindly with them. They are convincing; only the Thompson of scraps they condemn is not the Thompson we know by the book. When the *Pall Mall* says, "There is a terrible poem called 'The Anthem of Earth' without form and void, rhymeless and the work of a medieval and pedantic Walt Whitman," the point may be conceded, as between that particular critic and his particular Thompson; it is even possible to share with the *Pall Mall* its "deep-rooted irritability" when one has to contemplate on its pages tortuous and steep passages torn from their text.

Against the adverse may be set many good criticisms. Mr. Richard Whiteing wrote finely in the *Daily News*, for he cleared the hurdle of initial distaste: "It is idle to throw the book to the other end of the room. You have to pick it up again." In the *Speaker*, Sir A. T. Quiller-Couch, after commenting, as usual, on the supposed eulogies of the poet's "friends," continued: "On the other hand, to be stung into denying that he is a poet, and an extraordinarily fine one, is to lose one's head just as wildly and less pardonably. Of 'The Mistress of Vision,' I can only say that it recalls, after many days, the wonder and delight with which as a boy I first read 'Kubla Khan.'" In the *Daily Chronicle*, Mr. Archer recognised "a man of imagination all compact, a seer and singer of rare genius"; the *Athenæum*, "a singular mastery of verse"; the *Edin-*

burgh, "a great poet," while the *Academy* and the *Bookman* had handsome words. Notwithstanding these, the impression on public and poet was discouraging. The book sold badly, so that for the first half of the year in 1901 it brought in six shillings' worth of royalties: four copies had been sold. During the first half of 1902 the book found five buyers, and one half-year's cheque was for 2s. 11d.

He so far felt depressed by the consensus of adverse criticism as to write his thanks to one of the few kindly reviewers of the new book. He got in answer from Mr. William Archer, June 7, 1897:—

"I simply expressed (very inadequately) the pleasure your work had given me, without the least thought as to what anyone else thought or might think. That, however, is not strictly true. Your letter reminds me that I read some extracts to a friend, and then said, 'This is not work which can possibly be *popular* in the wide sense; but it is work that will be read and treasured centuries hence by those who really care for poetry.' I assure you no conceivable reaction can wipe out or overlay such work as yours. It is firm based on the rock of absolute beauty; and this I say all the more confidently because it does not happen to appeal to my own speculative, or even my own literary, prejudices."

Later he met Mr. Archer casually at Mr. Doubleday's house in Westminster, and his poetry and portrait figured in Mr. Archer's *Poets of the Younger Generation.*

He was not put out of humour by small royalties, but he had his tragic moments. His interruption during a reading of "Othello" at our house is never to be forgotten. Desdemona was dying, when an emphatic voice proclaimed: "Here's a go, Mrs. Meynell;

I have lost my *Athenæum* cheque." But he found it in another pocket.

If buffers had been needed between the unfavourable reception of *New Poems* and the sensibility of the author they were supplied at this time, in 1897, by Mr. Garvin's splendid appreciation of his previous works, *Poems* and *Sister Songs*, in the *Bookman*:—

"Even with the greatest pages of *Sister Songs* sounding in one's ears, one is sometimes tempted to think the 'Hound of Heaven' Mr. Thompson's high-water mark for unimaginable beauty and tremendous import—if we do damnably iterate Mr. Thompson's tremendousness, we cannot help it, he thrusts the word upon us. We do not think we forget any of the splendid things of an English anthology when we say that the 'Hound of Heaven' seems to us, on the whole, the most wonderful lyric (if we consider *Sister Songs* as a sequence of lyrics) in the language. It fingers all the stops of the spirit, and we hear now a thrilling and dolorous note of doom and now the quiring of the spheres and now the very pipes of Pan, but under all the still sad music of humanity. It is the return of the nineteenth century to Thomas à Kempis. In *Sister Songs* Mr. Thompson has passed from agonies to exultations. Of pure power he had not more to reveal. But *Sister Songs* has the very sense of Spring: there is some lovely renaissance of spirit in the book, a melting of snows and all dewy germinations of delight. What rhythms are so lissome and persuasive as those of the first part? In dainty and debonair invention it is altogether incomparable. *Sister Songs* opens with all the lyrical *élan* of Shelley perfectly married with the full and definite vision, the pure and vivid phrase of Keats. Thus in two of Mr. Thompson's many passages on childhood—

> Or if white-handed light
> Draw thee yet dripping from the quiet pools,
> Still lucencies and cools,
> Of sleep, which all night mirror constellate dreams;

and again—

. . . bubbles from the calyces
Of the lovely thoughts that breathe,
Paving like water-flowers thy spirit's floor beneath.

" The second part of *Sister Songs* is in a greater mood. It is the high ritual of beauty, a very apocalypse of poetry, and one should only labour the futility of terms in attempting to praise it. The primary things of poetry are newly and immortally said. But Mr. Thompson's receptive mind is saturated with modern thought, and he uses it in a singular way to deepen the ancient interpretations. He touches Darwinism, and it becomes transmutable in a lovely and poignant lyric:—

In pairing-time, we know, the bird
Kindles to its deepmost splendour,
And the tender
Voice is tenderest in its throat.

May we not dare to say of this passage (beginning—' Wild Dryad ! all unconscious of thy tree ' in *Sister Songs*) that it almost arrives at that ultimate thing, that ' one thought, one grace, one wonder at the least,' which for Marlowe was beyond the furthest reach of words, and which poets have been seeking to declare from the beginning of song ? Mr. Thompson's poetry scarcely comes by way of the outward eye at all. He scarcely depends upon occasions. In a dungeon one imagines that he would be no less a poet. The regal air, the prophetic ardours, the apocalyptic vision, the supreme utterance—he has them all. A rarer, more intense, more strictly predestinate genius has never been known to poetry. To many this may well appear the simple delirium of over-emphasis. The writer signs for those others, nowise ashamed, who range after Shakespeare's very Sonnets the poetry of a living poet, Francis Thompson."

CHAPTER XII

FRIENDS AND OPINIONS

THE friends he found for distraction in London were few, his acquaintances still fewer; thus his biographer, in falling back on such slight records as would go unnoticed in a life more thickly peopled, believes that they have at any rate the value of rarity. But in any case the chapter of his meetings could be more than matched with the chapter of his evasions. Thus ran the excuses:—

"Dear Wilfrid, I could not come in to tea with Blunt and Yeats, for I had to go down to the *Academy*, and was back much too late. Had I known on Thursday I would have altered my arrangements so as to accept your invitation. I am very sorry to have missed this chance of meeting Yeats, as I have long desired to do. You know I heartily admire his work."

Meredith's invitations he could not permanently resist. At Box Hill he spent a night in June 1896. Meredith had written to A. M., "You and the poet will have Heaven's welcome to the elect. But the cottage will be wounded if you desire not to sleep in it after having tried its poor resources. Be kind." To dine and sleep and wake in that small cottage was to be at very close quarters with nature and a man. With birds at the window, trees bowing and rustling at the back door, and at the front the vivid grass ready for his feet, Francis was thrust into the presence of a showy

bit of nature, and was hardly more easy than if he had been thrust at the theatre into a box directly adjoining a crowded stage. He would pull at his necktie, and smooth his coat, and be most warily conscious of the Meredith eye, like a husband's, "microscopic for defect." The singing of Meredith's blackbirds would be no less confusing than the stream of Meredith's voice; the nodding flowers and the brisk shadows, the sunshine and the talker, were all too strange to him. For years he had evaded such encounters; here he was forced to be seen and to see in the unclouded atmosphere of this garden on a hill, and during a long drive. To be on tremendously good terms with Nature for her own sake, with talk for its own sake, with French literature, with the Celt, was Meredith's way; Thompson was shy of so much clean-cut ability. Meredith's method was acceptance, whether of birds' song or Burgundy. Thompson's method was of refusal because he knew himself not robust enough to meet the flow of either.

Meredith praised "Love in Dian's Lap," quoting the lines—

> And on this lady's heart, looked you so deep,
> Poor Poetry has rocked himself to sleep;
> Upon the heavy blossom of her lips
> Hangs the bee Musing; nigh, her lids eclipse
> Each half-occulted star beneath that lies;
> And in the contemplation of those eyes,
> Passionless passion, wild tranquillities.

The lady, too, was in the garden to hear.

In his written comments on *Poems*, Meredith had fastened on the misprinted passages as if they were evidences of the wilfulness of the poet, and he recalled

these in talk, slow to relinquish an opportunity for chaff. With the *Edinburgh* praise of Thompson he proclaimed himself in agreement, writing (July 19, 1896), "I subscribe to the words on Francis Thompson's verse." But he also called Thompson turgid, on the eve of passing to the writing of his own ode on the French Revolution. He discovered no consecutive argument in *Sister Songs;* but for his banter he found an immediate opening; he invented a landlady for Thompson—Amelia Applejohn—to whom imaginary sonnets were addressed. He told how Amelia was summoned to Thompson's room to listen to the latest, rolling down her sleeves the while, and brushing the flour from her elbows. After Thompson's death, Meredith wrote to my father:—

"Box Hill, *February* 3, 1909.—The love of all the Meynells, let all the Meynells know, is precious to me. And the book of the poems (*Selected Poems*) was very welcome, though a thought of the poet's broken life gives pain. What he might further have done hangs at the closing page. Your part in his history should help to comfort you. What we have of him is mainly due to the Meynell family. Our Portia I may suppose to be now in Italy, and Italy seems to me her natural home. For me, I drag on, counting more years and not knowing why. I have to have an arm when I would walk. I am humiliated by requiring at times a repetition of sentences. This is my state of old age. But my religion of life is always to be cheerful; though I see little of my friends, I live with them.—Ever to be counted yours,

George Meredith."

One of the few occasions on which Francis entered a friend's house (always excepting ours) in London was when, in December 1896, he spent some weeks with

Mr. and Mrs. Doubleday. Like a little boy, he posted word to my father, as to his own, across the few intervening miles of London, of his safe arrival there, of his friend's kindness, and of his admiration of Mrs. Doubleday's music-making: "Mrs. Doubleday is very kind, and she is a simply exquisite pianist. Doubleday and I have fraternised over music." "My friend Alfred Hayes," he used to say, almost with ostentation. And the phrase remains because he so rarely proclaimed or could proclaim a relationship of the sort. That he paid a visit and wrote letters and verses to Mr. Hayes were, even if he forgot to despatch one of the letters, unusual marks of consideration. The visit planned, it followed that he did not turn up in the expected way, so that his host, in his anxiety, asked us for news, and later wrote from Edgbaston (October 13, 1896):—

"I wrote to you in some apprehension as to Thompson. He turned up at the wrong railway-station and performed some other singular feats, but those were mere details, and we enjoyed his visit very much. I hope it did him good in spite of the fact that I was obliged to leave him a good deal to his own devices, which consisted mainly in smoking innumerable pipes over the books he found in my study."

Mr. Hayes's further reminiscence of his guest:—

"The evenings were veritable *Noctes Ambrosianae;* but though the general impression of deep insight and opulent imagination, of many a flash of inspiration and radiant turn of speech, lingers as a precious recollection, the details of his conversation have vanished, for the most part, from memory, as completely as the precise hues and cloud-shapes of the sunsets of those memorable days. One indelible impression, however, remains—his amazing range of reading, the infallibility of his literary memory, and the consequent wealth of allusion he had at his command.

" At meals he would sit mostly silent, sometimes quitting the table, his food half consumed, as if at some imperious mandate, but somehow without leaving behind him the slightest suspicion of discourtesy. These sudden disappearances, whose cause I never sought to discover, soon came to be expected, and only provoked a smile—it was Thompson's way. But let it not be supposed that he was uncouth or affected; his manner was that of a great child; he was simply incapable of pose or unkindness.

" He was a pathetic figure. His form and face bore, only too clearly, the marks of those grim years of tribulation of soul and torment of body from which he had so recently been delivered. His appearance smote me with deep pity, but even deeper respect; and within a few hours he had won my affection. I was struck, as were the few intimate friends who once met him at my house, with a strange other-worldliness about him, as if he were conscious of making only a hasty sojourn on earth in the course of an illimitable journey. . . . I remember how the discoloured face would suddenly light up, and the dazed eyes flash, in such moments of happy excitement, as if a volcanic eruption of delight had broken through the crust of his soul. He gave me the impression of concealing within him two inexhaustible reservoirs of sorrow and joy; ebullitions from each appear in his poetry; but in his long talks with me he rarely drew except from the fountain of joy."

Some time after this visit he wrote to Mr. Hayes of his journalism, his book, and his desire to see his friend again:—

" I met Norman Gale, for a brief moment, at my publishers', in January or thereabouts. I was charmed with him. Alas, I am farther off from you than ever; it is not likely that I can visit you again for an unknown time to come. And I entertain such a happy recollection of you, your dear wife, and your charming children! Let us pray for the unexpected, which always happens, you know! Believe me, that I do not forget you ever."

Katharine King

From her invalid's couch, Mrs. Hamilton King, author of "The Disciples" and other poems, sent Francis messages of trust and commendation, and, guessing his need, wrote him many things that sounded bravely to one who accused himself of something worse than futility in friendship:—

"It is true that everyone must live out his own life, and I am not sure that it is good that another should live it for him; but you at least have done much for your friends. Coventry Patmore relied on you; and when I last saw Mr. Wilfrid Meynell he told me that both he and Mrs. Meynell felt themselves entirely your debtors—your poetry was so much for them. And you may have much more to do. I wish it were possible for you to live nearer and within reach of your friends. . . . It is a great consolation to feel that one has ministered to the most sensitive and precious among the children of God, and also it is a great joy and privilege to me to have your friendship."

Between 1896 and 1900 he also had correspondence with one who was especially his friend, Miss Katharine Douglas King, Mrs. Hamilton King's daughter. Before meeting her he had written:—

"Do you know that Miss K. Douglas King is—together with Winifred Lucas—one of the few women I ever desired particularly to meet? She has a temperament of genius heaped up and running over. I read through all her *Merry England* stories some months ago, and was startled by their individual and impressive note."

Her book, *The Child who will never Grow Old*, published two years later, bears on its first page his line, "The heart of Childhood, so divine for me." Miss King played with the Palace Court children, and worked among the poor children of the East End who often

figure in her stories. Francis once visited her and her charges at the hospital in Leonard Square. Writing to him subsequently, Miss King says:—

"I count you as an old friend, but I know now I did not really know you until Saturday. When you were by your little 'genius's'—Harry's—bed, and the baby boy Percy with the white shoes was at your knee, that was to me a revelation! I think of you now with that infant's serious, confiding face upturned to you. It was all so natural. To some people a child is a pretty ornamental *addition*. Your personality now seems incomplete without the child as the natural and exquisite finish to the whole man. Adieu, dear friend."

A later letter announces her impending marriage:—

"Forest Hall, *April* 1900.

"My dear Francis,—I have been wanting to write to you for so long, and yet have not been able to find time until now; and now I find it a little difficult, because one feels reluctant to speak of one's own great happiness to one whose life has been so sad and lonely as yours, even though that one should be so firm and true a friend as you have ever been to me. . . . I hope that my marriage will not bring me less, but more, in touch with my friends, amongst whom, Francis, I hope that I may ever count you as one of the first and nearest, and may God bless you.—Believe me, Yours always affectionately, Katharine D. King."

It was after this that he wrote of his friend: "Perhaps it was rather her crystal truth than the courage which (I think) came from it, not caused it, that won me at sight. Truth—*integrity* (or *oneness*) *of nature*—is what calls to me."

In the matter of his very few close friendships, he wrote to Miss Agnes Tobin of California,[1] a lover of

[1] To this lady's "genius for friendship" the dedication of Mr. Joseph Conrad's *Under Western Eyes* bears witness.

his poetry and herself a greatly admired translator of Petrarch's sonnets: " Of what you say of me in relation to your spiritual development I dare not trust myself to write, lest I offend the modesty of words: it comes as a great prop to a life very lonely of support."

Mrs. Vernon Blackburn is elsewhere named; but of other acquaintances among women he had none, or only such as lasted during one or two meetings. Millicent, Duchess of Sutherland's invitations to her Stafford House parties were found retained among his dusty papers like adventurous Sisters of Charity, stiff and clean in the ragged company of a neglected correspondence, old pipes, and newspaper-cuttings.

The people he did not know yet counted for something in his history. He has been associated with some he might have known, but did not; and with others he could never have known. Oscar Wilde, on hearing some of *Sister Songs* read aloud, said, " Why can't I write poetry like that ? That is what I've wanted to do all my life." Why, indeed ? The two, however, did not meet. In a letter from Mrs. Wilde, I find, " I so enjoyed Mr. Thompson's visit to me on Friday," and in another, June 1894, " Oscar was quite charmed with the lines you read him of Francis Thompson."

Of other invitations he did not accept were those from Mrs. Louise Chandler Moulton that he should sometimes go to her " for a quiet talk *à deux* "; from Elliott and Fry that he should be photographed " in his study "; from a *World* writer that he should be interviewed as a subject for one of the " Celebrities at Home "—he who had not so much as a waste-paper basket !

In 1897 Mr. Lewis Hind found that the *Academy* might welcome something every week from Thompson, and wrote telling him so. Then he came into touch, slowly as was his way, with the office staff, itself in a hurry. " I saw what I concluded was Clarence Rook at the *Academy* on Wednesday, but we did not even exchange a look, for Hind did not introduce us. So I left convinced that Hind meant to get out the *Academy* by hook or by C. Rook." From this time began his friendship with E. V. Lucas and with Wilfred Whitten. All these, along with the " management," learnt how to smile on the trials provided by this contributor. Mr. Whitten has written:—

" I first met Francis Thompson at the *Academy* office in Chancery Lane, in 1897, the year in which, with his *New Poems*, he took farewell of poetry and began, I fear, to look on life as so much dead lift, so much needless postscript to his finished epistle. . . . We gave Thompson as many books of theology, history, biography, and, of course, poetry as he cared to review. It was a usual thing, in reading the proofs, for one of us to exclaim aloud on his splendid handling of a subject demanding the best literary knowledge and insight. Thompson came frequently to the office to receive books for review, and to bring in his ' copy.' Every visit meant a talk, which was never curtailed by Thompson. This singer, who had soared to themes too dazzling for all but the rarest minds—this poet of the broken wing and the renounced lyre, had not become moody or taciturn. At his best he was a fluent talker, who talked straight from his knowledge and convictions, yet never for victory. He weighed his words, and would not hurt a controversial fly. On great subjects he was slow or silent; on trifles he became grotesquely tedious. This dreamer seemed to be surprised into a kind of exhilaration at finding himself in contact with small realities. And then the fountains of memory would

be broken up, or some quaint corner of his *amour propre* would be touched. He would explain nine times what was clear, and talk about snuff or indigestion or the posting of a letter until the room swam round us.

" A stranger figure than Thompson's was not to be seen in London. Gentle in looks, half-wild in externals, his face worn by pain and the fierce reactions of laudanum, his hair and straggling beard neglected, he had yet a distinction and an aloofness of bearing that marked him in the crowd; and when he opened his lips he spoke as a gentleman and a scholar. A cleaner mind, a more naïvely courteous manner, were not to be found. It was impossible and unnecessary to think always of the tragic side of his life. He still had to live and work in his fashion, and his entries and exits became our most cheerful institution. His great brown cape, which he would wear on the hottest days, his disastrous hat, and his dozen neglects and make-shifts were only the insignia of our ' Francis ' and of the ripest literary talent on the paper. No money (and in his later years Thompson suffered more from the possession of money than from the lack of it) could keep him in a decent suit of clothes for long. Yet he was never ' seedy.' From a newness too dazzling to last, and seldom achieved at that, he passed at once into a picturesque nondescript garb that was all his own and made him resemble some weird pedlar or packman in an etching by Ostade. This impression of him was helped by the strange object—his fish-basket, we called it—which he wore slung round his shoulders by a strap. It had occurred to him that such a basket would be a convenient receptacle for the books which he took away for review, and he added this touch to an outward appearance which already detached him from millions. . . . He had ceased to make demands on life. He ear-marked nothing for his own. As a reviewer, enjoying the run of the office, he never pounced on a book; he waited, and he accepted. Interested still in life, he was no longer intrigued by it. He was free from both apathy and desire. Unembittered, he kept his sweetness and sanity, his dewy laughter, and his fluttering gratitude. In such a man

outward ruin could never be pitiable or ridiculous, and, indeed, he never bowed his noble head but in adoration. I think the secret of his strength was this: that he had cast up his accounts with God and man, and thereafter stood in the mud of earth with a heart wrapt in such fire as touched Isaiah's lips."

He had no valet of whom to make a conquest; but a friendly editor, at any rate, was at his feet, even when they were unpunctual. Lewis Hind writes:—

"In memory I see him one miserable November afternoon communing with the Seraphim, and frolicking with the young-eyed Cherubim in Chancery Lane. The roads were ankle-deep in slush; a thin, icy rain was falling; the yellow fog enwrapped the pedestrians squelching down the lane; and, going through them in a narrow-path, I saw Francis Thompson, wet and mud-spattered. But he was not unhappy. What is a day of unpleasant weather to one who lives in eternity? His lips were moving, his head was raised, his eyes were humid with emotion, for above the roof of the Chancery Lane Safe Deposit Company, in the murk of the fog, he saw beatific visions. They were his reality, not the visible world. He was on his way to the office of the *Academy* with the manuscript of a book review, and on his damp back was slung the weather-worn satchel in which he would carry away volumes for the ensuing week. A Thompson article in the *Academy* gave distinction to the issue. What splendid prose it was! Reading the proofs, we would declaim passages aloud for the mere joy of giving utterance to his periods. He wrote a series of articles on 'Poets as Prose Writers' which must some day be recovered from the files; he wrote on anything. I discovered that his interest in battles, and the strategy of great commanders was as keen as his concern with cricket. So the satchel was filled with military memoirs, and retired generals ensconced in the armchairs of service clubs wondered. Here was a man who manipulated words as they manipulated men. Once or twice in those seven years of our intercourse a flame of his

old poetic fire blazed out, and once I was able to divert the flame into the pages of the *Academy*. When Cecil Rhodes died I telegraphed to Thompson to hasten to the office. That was on a Monday. He appeared on the Tuesday. I asked him point blank if he would write an ode on Cecil Rhodes for the next issue of the paper, and without waiting for his refusal talked Rhodes to him for half an hour, roused his enthusiasm, and he departed with a half promise to deliver the ode on Thursday morning. Thursday came and nearly passed. I sent him three telegrams, but received no answer. It was necessary to go to press at eight o'clock. At half-past six he arrived, and proceeded to extract from his pockets a dozen and more scraps of crumpled paper, each containing a fragment of the ode. I pieced them together, sent the blurred manuscript to the printers, gave him money for his dinner, and exacted a promise that he would return in an hour to read the proof. He returned dazed and incoherent, read the proof standing and swaying as he read, and murmured: 'It's all right.' It was all right. I am prouder of having published that ode than of anything else that the *Academy* ever contained."

Scruples in criticism, anxiety over ten shillings overdrawn from the *Academy's* cashier, and the imaginary coldness of his editor in consequence, brought letters a column long, and though abbreviated (as many given in this book must be), they are sufficiently characteristic of a profuse manner:—

"DEAR HIND,—I muddled up the time altogether to-day. How, I do not now understand. I started off soon after 2. Thinking I had time for a letter to the *Academy* which it had been in my mind to write, I delayed my journey to write it. When I was drawing to a conclusion, I heard the clock strike 3 (as it seemed to me). I thought I should soon be finished, so went on to the end. A few minutes later, as it appeared, the clock struck again, and I counted 6. Alarmed, I rushed off—vexed that I should get in by

half-past 4 instead of half-past 3, as I intended—and finished the thing in the train. I got to the *Academy*, and was struck all of a heap. There was nobody there, and it was ten past six! How I did it, I do not even now understand. I will be with you in good time to-morrow. But that cannot make amends to myself for such a *fiasco* and waste of time.—Yours, F. T."

At other times his copy is late because he has no stamp; or, thinking he has delivered an article, the next day he finds half of it still in his pocket; but illness is his stand-by, his most robust excuse. As thus:—

"DEAR HIND,—I was taken sick on my way to the station, not having been to bed all night, and having been working a good part of to-day; and though I came on as soon as I could pull myself together again, I was too late. So I leave here the Dumas article, which I brought with me, and will be down to-morrow morning, when I am told you will be here. —Yours in haste, F. THOMPSON."

Of the ethics of reviewing he writes at length, to the Editor:—

"I regret that—in pressure of work and ill-health—Miss Frances Power Cobbe's letter, which you forwarded me, has not received the immediate attention which it deserved. I regret that my review should strike her as a personal attack. But I cannot see that it exceeded the limits of impartial criticism. Miss Power Cobbe seems to imply that I in some way found Miss Shore's poems 'morally objectionable.' I am unaware of any sentence which could create such an impression. For the rest, I was necessarily unaware of Miss Shore's personal circumstances. I was not even aware of its being her first book of poems. When a book comes before a reviewer for criticism, he cannot be expected to know or take account of personal matters—of anything outside the book itself. Many things might plead that he should be very gentle with the author,

but he has no knowledge of them. The book is an impersonal thing to him; and the author who publishes a book becomes impersonal, and must expect to be treated as a mere name at the head of so many printed pages; it is the inevitable consequence of publication. The critic can but register his impressions, coldly impartial by his very function. Did he abstain from the blame he thought just, because (for example) of the writer's sex, it would be equivalent to abdicating criticism where women are concerned, extending the privileges of the drawing-room to the reviewing-column. But women of literary power would be the first to protest against the insincerity of 'letting them off' because of their sex."

But it may be judged that reviewing is not always so strict a business:—

"I have been very unwell for the last two or three weeks, or your urgent requests should have been better attended to. The Dunlop article was finished on Monday week, when I got your letter from Henley, and consequently had partly to re-write it. And unluckily an attack of sickness which confined me to bed prevented my getting it in yesterday, although it was actually done. But I trust I am now much better all round, and shall be able to give the *Academy* proper attention. I trust I have met Henley's wishes in the article as it now stands. I had no notion, to begin with, that there was so much to-do over the book; and so I had treated it slightly. I will call in on Monday, in case you have anything you might wish to say in regard to it."

This was no longer the Henley of the great time, when every issue of the *Scots Observer* contained a poem or essay fit to make a beginning of fame for one of the "young men"; when this week the new cadences of Kipling's "Barrack-Room Ballads" sent city readers swinging and chanting back from their offices towards

suburban sunset and supper. All the precious persons of his choice made the bluff figure of the chief the more defined. To himself he was "the Captain of my Fate," but others knew him as the captain of a newspaper staff. Famous for the young men he made his own, he is here recalled for the young man he rejected. My father sent him a poem by Francis Thompson which, consistently enough, he refused. Indocile, he would probably still have resolution to refuse verses "reeking of Shelley, whom I detest." It is proof of his perception that from the first he knew the newcomer was no shipmate for the Captain Silver of the literary weeklies. In the description of the lame pirate of *Treasure Island* the likening of his face to a ham suggests that the image of the editor, more massive than those of any two contributors, was before Stevenson as he wrote; pirate and editor had each a crutch, and each threw it at an intruder. Thompson's words of Henley and his last book impute to him, too, a Silver's grip:—

". . . We know exactly the best he has done, and resent instinctively the slightest deflection from it. Well, here there are such deflections—that is all which can be said; and we feel them in exact proportion to our love of the Henley who took us masterfully by the throat of old. He still takes us by the throat, but his grip is not compulsive. Yet now and again the old mastery thrills us, and we remember. It is good to remember."

And Henley on his side learnt to admire. Where the poet had failed, the journalist writing about *The Centenary Burns* had his strong approval:—

"*March* 7, 1897.—Thompson's article, which came in this morning, is quite masterly throughout. The worst I can say against it is, indeed, that it anticipates some parts

of my own terminal essay, so that I shall have to quote it instead of writing out of my own stomach. All manner of compliments to him, and a thousand thanks. I know not which to admire the more: his critical intelligence or his intellectual courage."

Writing a year later, Henley, on the defensive, said:—

"My dear Hind,—What a jackass is your F. Thompson! I have never babbled the *Art for Art's Sake* babble. If I have, I'll eat the passage publicly. *What* I've said is, the better the writer the better the poet: that, in fact, good writing's better than bad. That is my only formula, and that I'm no more likely to swallow than F. T. is to write invariably well.—Yours ever sincerely,

W. E. Henley."

Later Henley and Thompson were to meet:—

"My dear Thompson,—I saw Henley on Saturday. He wants us to call on him next Friday afternoon. Will you be here at three *sharp?* Henley said some very nice things about you, and is quite anxious to meet you. He also bids me say that he is looking forward to your excursions on the Prophets. So do hurry them up. He tells me that many of the lyrics in his Anthology are from the Old Testament.—Sincerely yours, Lewis Hind."

His only encounter with the poet of Muswell Hill followed, but not at three *sharp*. His escort, E. V. Lucas and Lewis Hind, marvelled long at his unpunctuality. Francis owed neither his soul nor hours to any man, and was late even for the Henley who was the master of both for many others. "I have had no time to eat, Hind," was his gloomy beginning. Mr. Hind has described what followed a meal at the station: "Suddenly he became rigid, his body swayed, and a film came over his eyes. A minute or two passed;

then he recovered, lighted his pipe, and did not refer to the episode. We arrived at Henley's house two hours late." But it was he who fronted and appeased the wrathful master with talk of "London Voluntaries." Instead of reeking of Shelley, he showed himself reeking of Henley, who was not "abhorrent." Thompson's admirations were always well set up and bright-eyed because they were so well reasoned. No prepossessions, whims, or sloths made up his opinion. His attention was widely inclusive. Often would he come with some cutting of fugitive verse and tender it for what it was worth, reading it aloud and expecting from his audience the controlled and properly adjusted pleasure he himself experienced. So tolerant was he, that anybody's complaint that there "was nothing in it" would cause him to reconsider his cutting; the "anybody" of poetry or criticism was the recipient of his constant courtesy. He was very slow—too slow for the short span of his life to alter his allegiance to literature that had ever seriously contented him. The novels of Lord Lytton he read again at the end of his life because he had early cared for them, and reasonably, he found. So with Hardy; of one passage I remember him to have often spoken with particular admiration—that in which Sergeant Troy thralls a woman by sword-play and the swinging of his flashing steel round and round her person. So with Meredith, over whose novels I have found him sitting in a Westbourne Grove confectioner's, with, I am sure, "review" books unreviewed in his bag, and in his pocket telegrams from an expectant *Academy* editor.

Henley and he were amiable for an afternoon; but

the difference between them could hardly have been bridged for longer. Thompson writes lightly in the following note-book comment, but he is treading lightly because the ground beneath quakes with radical conflict:—

"We are convinced Mr. H. has been misled by a false report. It is the more probable because Spring, of late years, has been flighty, and given rise to dissatisfied comment. We are aware that C. P. has spoken of 'all amorous May,' and yet another poet has gone so far as to call the same lady 'wanton.' But 'the harlot spring'—Captain, these be very bitter words. Why in the name of wilfulness, why must poor Spring—of all seasons, poor Spring—be a harlot? Even the author of *Dolores*, with all his disrelish for 'lilies and languors,' has not committed defloration of the poor young maid—'the girl child Spring'; he leaves her as he found her. If she escaped the dangerous society of Mr. S. (whose verse would 'thaw the consecrated snow that lies on Dian's lap') we cannot believe she should later make this slip."

Of Henley's "fads, blindnesses, wilful crotchets," as also of his critical prose, "the swift and restless brilliance of a leaping salmon in the sunlight," he wrote in the *Academy* and brought, in doing so, the thought to one's mind of his own dissimilarity.

Perhaps nowhere in all the thousand columns he contributed to the Press is a single wilful word. The unexpected must never be expected of him. His views on the general literature of the past may be taken for granted, or sought in their proper place. He will seldom be found at variance with the accepted estimates. Perhaps only once does he stand nearly alone. One of his earliest essays—"Bunyan in the Light of Modern Criticism"—approved Richard Dowling's assault

upon *The Pilgrim's Progress.* Thompson could not tolerate the dulness and insufficiency of Bunyan's descriptions:—

> " In the account of the Valley of Despair he does flicker into a meagre glimmer of description; but its only effect is to leave the darkness of his fancy visible, and he flickers feebly out again. The Mouth of Hell is by the way; and, after his usual commonplace manner of vision, he introduces this tremendous idea with a dense flippancy, such as never surely was accorded it before."

But one goes to his critical work, less for its consistent good faith and sound sense, than for the few dominant, vital enthusiasms that hold him and would have been written of even had he never contributed to the papers. As a reviewer he put aside much of his impulsive affection; his " Crashaw," in its carefully critical tone, seems to deny an admiration nearly always reflected in Thompson's own verse. Rossetti's name got into Thompson's criticisms from every quarter; it is in " Paganism Old and New," in the " Don Quixote," in " Crashaw," and in a dozen other papers; it dogs de Quincey's in and out of all the prose work. His earlier admiration of Swinburne is restated with reserves in his *Academy* review of the collected works of that poet. Many younger poets might have been made the happier had they been aware whose was the pen that praised them in print. In *Hand in Hand, Verses by a Mother and Daughter*, he makes the discovery of a sonnet with a last line that " is a touch of genius "—a sonnet by the daughter, Mr. Rudyard Kipling's sister, and called " Love's Murderer." Under the heading " Above Average," 1901, he deals with the

books of Mr. Aleister Crowley and Mr. Madison Cawein. He welcomes in the *Academy* the poetry of Mr. Sturge Moore, Mr. Alfred Noyes, and Lord Alfred Douglas; and, anticipating George Meredith, he praises Dora Sigerson Shorter for her gifts of metrical narrative, adding: "Her ballads touch a deep and poignant feeling. The unconsciousness of a child contrasted with the sorrow of its earthly lot—this is a familiar theme, yet Mrs. Shorter handles it with unfamiliar freshness and power." He pulls the ropes for Mr. Newbolt's *Admirals All;* he ducks his head to Mr. Owen Seaman's parodies. He gathers "the teeming felicities" from the *Studies in Prose and Verse* of Mr. Arthur Symons. He was one of the few critics who "lived by admiration." At the end of a day of reviewing he would still have the spirit to cut occasional verses from his evening paper and carry them for approbation to friends often quicker than he to shrug fastidious shoulders.

Aubrey de Vere, a man who had personal recollections of Wordsworth and whose manners and poetry both belonged to a statelier age, he met at Palace Court. The obituary notice of de Vere in the *Academy* was written by him. From the "Ode to the Daffodil" and "Autumnal Ode" he quotes enough to justify, with reservation, a high admiration:—

"Of warmth he was capable, especially in his younger days, but not of pathos or subtle suggestion. His general manner, it must be owned, was somewhat coldly grave. One of his odes is fine, with passages of absolute grandeur; some of his sonnets are only not among the best in that kind."

His appreciations were not ordered by papers committed to a policy of praise. On the contrary, he wrote: "My editors complain that I don't *go* for people—that I am too lenient." For all that, he knew the distress of the vapid verse that came his way, and he stopped to note-book it in rhyme:—

> Of little poets, neither fool nor seer,
> Aping the larger song, let all men hear
> How weary is our heart these many days!
>
> Of bards who, feeling half the thing they say,
> Say twice the thing they feel, and in such way
> Piece out a passion . . .
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Of bards indignant in an easy chair
> (Because just so great bards before them were)
> Who yet can only bring
> With all their toil
> Their kettle of verse to sing,
> But never boil,—
> How weary is our heart these many days!

But the solace he had to the drudgery of reviewing was generally ancient. When he could set to and write a solid *Academy* page on the "clod-paced Drayton," could note the sluggishness of "his thick-coming ideas in the strait pen of a defined stanza," chaff him for the room he needs to turn about in, and cry "hear, hear!" to his minor metres, he was doing lively work and was lively at it. Or when Samuel Daniel comes up for judgement, the critic is manifestly happy—happier than in the presence of Maurice Hewlett or Kipling. A review of an Elizabethan is touched with a quicker interest than that of the weightiest in contemporary

literature. The evenness of his judgement, the unbiassed distribution of his attention makes for fairness, but somewhat spoils the current and local effectiveness. He enjoyed getting at Butler's wit more than getting at Oscar Wilde's. *Hudibras* was a book of the moment for him, whereas *The Yellow Book* was not. St Francis de Sales might tempt him on a bookstall, but not a new work. D'Annunzio and publishers' announcements did not catch his pennies; nor were his borrowings much more modern. The authors he had from my shelves were Swedenborg and Shakespeare, with, for exception, W. W. Jacobs, in whose jolly company he spent some of the last hours of his life.

CHAPTER XIII

THE LONDONER

IN days when London is cracked and bleared with cold, and passengers on the black pavement are whipped by the East wind and chivied by the draughts of the gutters, Thompson would be the most forlorn and shrivelled figure in the open. It always seemed to be a necessity of his to be out in rough weather. I never knew him to stay in on its account; and at times when riches themselves lack confidence, and an universal scourge of cold and ugliness lashes the town, he was about. Even within, beside a fire, he was a weathercock of a man. The distress of his hands, and the veering of his hair from the comparative orderliness of other times would instantly proclaim an East wind. It was written all over him, and, though come to the shelter of four walls, the tails of his coat seemed still to be fluttering. One thought of him when cold winds blew as of the Pope of Chesterfield's description—"... his poor body a mere Pandora's box, containing all the ills that ever afflicted humanity." Sensitive beyond endurance, Francis yet made nought of his pains so long as the keener sensitiveness of his conscience was undisturbed. Of all men the least fit to endure physical suffering, he endured it forgetfully and even light-heartedly until he felt the chills of spiritual estrangement.

Spring in Kilburn

He was not more comfortable in the sun; and against the particular heat of 1906 he felt particular ill-will. "Most people expatiate on the excellence of this summer, though the angry and malignant sun is as unlike the true summer sun as the heat of fever to the heat of youth." It was his habit to go forth in August in an ulster—threadbare, perhaps—but his own fever alone explains his distress. *Sister Songs* opens with a complaint against the spring season of 1891:—

Shrewd winds and shrill,—were these the speech of May?
A ragged, slag-grey sky—invested so,
Mary's spoilt nursling, wert thou wont to go?

"To my Godchild" opens in the same manner. The early months, drenched with icy rain, had meant misery and dumbness. Breaking of silence came with the breaking of the frost, and the poetry which returned with the warm weather is full of acknowledgements. It is something more than the small-talk of his verse; it is, like the dedications of the eighteenth century, a formal obeisance to a patron—"Sun-god and song-god."

The Spring found him happiest. The May of his poems is the May known to the Londoner. After deploring, in the proem of *Sister Songs*, the lateness of the fine weather, it is suddenly upon him. He discovered it for certain round a street corner not far from his lodgings in the Elgin Avenue—

Mark yonder how the long laburnum drips
Its jocund spilth of fire, its honey of wild flame.

That is the signal familiar to the Londoner. Most of the details of his description in *Sister Songs*, from the

stars to Covent Garden clock, are metropolitan. From his high room, down steep stairs, a faded oilcloth at his feet, the coiling patterns of a varnished wall-paper at his restricted elbow; through the muffled light and air of the hall, and past the broken stucco of the front steps, he would emerge on a morning of good fortune, to see, not a dismal street of other lodgings exactly like his own, but

> A garden of enchanting
> In visionary May,
> Swayless for the spirit's haunting,
> Thrice threefold walled with emerald from our mortal mornings grey.

We may imagine that St Francis cared not overmuch for the look of the Assisi streets; it is doubtful whether Francis of Kilburn cared at all about the aspect of Kilburn. The gayest thoroughfare caught his eye no more than the most dismal—and Brondesbury is not gay. To " And your new lodging, Francis, what of it ?" he would give a good account of the rights and lefts that led there, but he would make no picture of it for you, having none himself. I do not suppose he found the soot and stucco architecture of Elgin Avenue any more or less entertaining than the red brick of Palace Court, and, while he might know Oxford Street as " stony-hearted," I doubt if he could have described to the satisfaction of a builder the nature of its exterior stone.

After his return from Pantasaph, his days were mostly spent at Palace Court and his nights in the region which at first by accident and later by habit was his own. When, many years before, he came from Storrington, he was lodged at Fernhead Road, Padding-

ton, and afterwards at various houses in Elgin Avenue. Faithful to the northerly district, his last lodging was at 128 Brondesbury Road, Kilburn. At the junction of Elgin Avenue and Chippenham Road is the " Skiddaw " public-house, by whose parlour-fire he often spent nocturnal hours in preference to the hearths of the critics. Mr. Pile, the tobacconist next door, was remembered for the support that he gave to Francis's tremulous claims to a place near the fire. Francis seldom failed to receive kindness at the hands of casual men; his constant courtesy of speech and his humility were to their liking. From the whispered hints of Mr. Pile it was understood in the little bar-parlour crowd that the frail, shabby man of many platitudes and an abstracted eye was privileged.

From the situation of his lodgings it came about that the Edgware Road was his Rambla, his Via dei Palazzi, his Rue de Rivoli; and at the end of it, the site of Tyburn Tree. No local allusion, however, finds place in his " To the English Martyrs," which is another sign of his aloofness. But when he writes of the Tyburn Tree that—

> The shadow lies on England now
> Of the deathly-fruited bough,
> Cold and black with malison
> Lies between the land and sun;
> Putting out the sun, the bough
> Shades England now,

his voice rose from the frozen and fogged pavement that marks the very spot.

Browning, too, knew, and far better, the " cheap jewellery and servants' underclothing " of the Edgware

Road. Unlike Browning, Thompson had no eye for values. And among night-caps, he would never have known that they were cotton, and hardly that they were red. As soon as say whether jewellery or clothing was cheap, he could have argued with Browning on the vintages. A connoisseur in his books by right of imagination, his connoisseurship would not have passed muster in the shops. His waggon of wares ran smoothly enough in starry traces; but hitched to cart-horses in Edgware Road he could not have driven it ten yards. Perhaps when Patmore, a collector of rubies and sapphires, drew specimen stones from his waistcoat, Thompson was thrilled with the real presence; but not so much as by the love of immaterial jewels. Not even Meredith's burgundy could teach him—who had written of grapes against the sun without ever entering a vineyard—anything of wine-merchant's wine.

His inattention in the Edgware Road was out and out; one marvels that he ever turned the right corner, and not at all that he was knocked down by a cab. But instinctively his eyes would open in fair presences; the things that made poetry struck through his closed lids, as daylight through a sleeper's. But inattention in the Edgware Road made the place blank as a railway tunnel. He could look upon the raiment of his sitter in " Love in Dian's Lap," and pay his compliments, but never a word had he for the bonnets of mistress or maid upon the highway. Riding in an omnibus he would not know whether Mlle. Polaire or a Sister of Charity were at his side.

He was constantly alone; and, often as I have met him in the streets of London, I have seldom surprised

him in a conscious moment. He would walk past, looking straight before him; and if he was always late for his appointments, and took longer, by several hours, to get home at night than the average man, it was because he would retrace his steps, and go to and fro upon a certain beat as if indefinitely postponing the evil moment when he would have to confine himself for food or sleep.

The lamps of the town bring moths from the dark fields. They had no attraction for him. I never heard him talking of the beauty of London. He never went sight-seeing; the town was the dun background of his own visions, but certain actualities were etched vividly or heavily massed upon his mental canvas. Certain things he knew more completely than the practised desultory observer, and when, in 1897, he was asked by Messrs. Constable for a book on London, he could at once fetch out of the studio of his memory a great number of pictures that had been stored there, their faces to the wall. Although "my London book" and the work on it made for several months his password to late meals at our house, he never wrote it. His letters to William Hyde, whose drawings were to make half the book, were, as it proved, Francis's only contribution to the scheme:—

"47, Palace Court, W.—Dear Mr. Hyde,—I regret to have delayed my answer to your letter so long. Firstly, I was occupied by unavoidable business; secondly, when I was free to consider your notes, it took me some time really to master them, and consider my plan in relation to them. In the first place, I do not design a consecutive narrative of any kind. I do not design to treat either topography or the life of London, for both of which I am utterly

unqualified. My design is to give impressions of London, such as present themselves to a wanderer through its streets. I intend to divide the book into parts, which—by way of provisional title—I might describe as Fair London and Terrible London. For Fair London, the plates you have already done will supply sufficient material in the way of illustration. The other part will consist of studies of London under its darker aspects—weird, sordid, and gloomy—being drawn from its appearance rather than its life. Under this section would come some of the plates already done; and I have marked others among your notes, any of which would fall into my ideas. Since the darker aspect of London is particularly evident to a houseless wanderer, it is my idea to include in this section a description of the aspect of London from midnight to early dawn—for which my own experiences furnish me with material. I intend to take my wanderer through the Strand, Covent Garden, Trafalgar Square, perhaps part of Piccadilly, the Embankment, Blackfriars Bridge, &c., bringing him round to Fleet Street opposite St Paul's at dawn; and to describe the night effects and the effects of gradual dawn in the streets. You can see for yourself that some of your suggested drawings would be embraced in this, perhaps some of those already done—for example, ' Coffee Stall, early morning '; the ' Houseless wanderer sleeping in the streets,' and even the ' Factory at Night,' since I have in my mind such a factory across Westminster. And I intend to describe a night fire; and the effects of vistas of lamps in such a neighbourhood as Pall Mall. Locality, you will see, is unimportant. It is *effect* I wish to dwell on; the *character*—of horror, sombreness, weirdness, or beauty—of various scenes. My own mind turns especially towards the gloomier majesties and suggestiveness of London, because I have seen it most peculiarly under those aspects."

As Francis's copy was never produced, the book was written by another author.

Thompson's landladies were his faithful, patient, and

puzzled friends. He disliked their food, broke their rules, burnt their curtains, but seldom rebuked them. They, on their part, found in him none of the virtue of a good lodger. Notwithstanding, they showed a gentleness of regard and manner that did credit to their liberality. I have known them express an unwillingness to lose him quite out of proportion to his value as a lodger, and he showed himself more reluctant to move away from them than was always consistent with their excellence as landladies. Of one of these he was genuinely fond, and her feeling for him she sought to explain when she said, " I can sympathise with him, you know, having a son in the profession myself." It was she who sought to mend his unsociable ways by subtle attacks upon his solitude, saying, " It's very nice for Mr. Thompson; he's got the trains at the back every half hour and more, when he's in his bedroom. But then the trains, when all's said, aren't the same as the company he could get downstairs. Many a time I've asked him to have his bit of lunch in with me and the other ' mental '—oh yes, she's a mental case, as I may have told you." On a few occasions she did entice him to her table, but more often he was content with the conversation of the District Railway engines at the bottom of the garden. His own comment on the trains was among the random manuscripts found in that same bedroom:—

> The very demon of the scene,
> The screaming horror of the train,
> Rushes its iron and ruthless way amain,
> A pauseless black Necessity,
> Along its iron and predestined path.

One landlady's memories of him are supported by the carpet in his room, which is worn in a circle round his table. All night long he would walk round and round; in the morning he would go to bed. There was, she observed, a delicate precision in his manner that forbade all familiarity. His prayers, pronounced as if he were preaching, she often heard.

An interior glimpse comes from a fellow-lodger:—

"I will tell you things as I remember them at the Elgin Avenue establishment. There was a Bengali, who showed me how to play poker; there was a convert parson, a dramatic critic, and a man who acted. I seem to remember playing cards with them better than anything. It was generally then that Thompson would come in at the front door, and call down the kitchen-stairs for his porridge and beer. Coming into the room, he would talk of something he had seen or read; or of food, cricket, or clothes. He wished he had bought a suit in a shop-window, because he had given more for those he wore. I fancy he was not exactly rich; I suppose none of us were. He would eat; then walk up and down the room talking at any ear that might be listening or at none; then he would write under the gas-jet. He would leave as he came. I don't suppose he ever gave me a look, and I had no idea he was a great man. But I *remember* him; though for the rest, I only know they existed."

Wilfred Whitten tells of the rare—perhaps the only—occasion on which Thompson dined in a restaurant with a friend:—

"Some seven years since we dined together at the Vienna Café. You remember how, in the one conversation which Boswell felt himself powerless to report, Johnson 'ran over the grand scale of human knowledge.' Thus it was that night. Thompson called up the masters of poetry, and their mighty lines. I shall never forget his repeating this,

from ' Comus,' as one of the things in all English verse that he relished—

> Not that nepenthe which the wife of Thone
> In Egypt gave to Jove-born Helena.

These words fell on my ear like the music of all poetry, and I turned to see Thompson's eyes humid with a vast understanding. He dealt in these great names and antiquities. The arts, the rites, the mysteries, and the sciences of eld gave him their secrets and their secret words. But I think he loved the pomp of facts only that he might transmute it into the pomp of dreams, and where his dreams ended let his poetry tell."

Mr. Whitten's is the testimony of one who met him familiarly enough to know his better sort of talk. The impressions of those who met him only once or twice generally agree with Mr. William Hyde's:—

" I remember that he was so shy and nervous that I felt anxious not to say anything that would increase his diffidence. The tragedy of his aspect was obvious. Of the glorious moments he must have lived in when the soul was master very few external traces could be seen, save his eyes."

Which were his churches ? I fear not much more inspiriting as buildings than his restaurants. When the cross-roads did not make his transept and the shops his aisle, he made shift with thin modern Gothic, with rigid varnished bench and Belgian Madonnas. His altars were decked with brass vases and huddled bunches of the disconcerting flowers of commerce. Being a late and irregular comer, he would often find instead of a priest, the charwoman dryly banging her broom among the chairs. In the Harrow Road, be-

tween a printing-shop and a tobacconist's, was the church nearest the lodging of several years. To St Mary of the Angels, Bayswater, he also went upon occasion. He seemed the last person on earth to note if the candlesticks came not from Cellini, but Birmingham; if the altar-rails were soap-stone travesties of antiquity. And yet he had, at any rate in verse, his preferences. In " Gilded Gold " he refers to

> Degenerate worshippers who fall
> In purpled kirtle and brocade
> To 'parel the white Mother-Maid.

And he decides that her image as it stood arrayed

> In vests of its self-substance wrought
> To measure of the sculptor's thought

is " slurred by these added braveries." It is doubtful whether he would have crossed the road to hear one preacher in preference to another, or to hear any; it is certain that he was as content to go to his prayers through a slit in a thin brick wall as under the tympanum of Chartres.

Lionel Johnson, who couples Francis with the Martyr Southwell for " devout audacity," has said the things that are to say of the sacred poet's familiar attitude. He quotes the gentleman who confuted the view that man's attitude towards God must necessarily be abject: " Not abject! Certainly, it should be deferential, but not abject." Against the deferential gentleman he ranges all saints and poets, " His carollers and gay minstrels—His merry men."

However unpunctually he attended church, Francis had his own very strictly observed devotional formali-

ties. Every note-book from Ushaw days till his death is dedicated with some such holy device as this:—

DEO IN QUO ET PER QUEM MEDITATIONES
EJUS REMEDITO.

He had his triumphs at the Vatican, his victories at Farm Street; a Pope's messenger sought him in the Harrow Road with his Holiness's thanks for his translation of a pontifical ode, and of course did not find him. There is a legend that about this time he wrote an "Ecclesiastical History"—no less!—put the MS. into the hands of Cardinal Vaughan to be read during a journey to Rome, and so lost it. The disappearance of the book might pass for fact, but I find no line about it among his papers, either before or after its alleged existence. His habit was to herald any attempt with written notes and exhortations to himself to begin, as thus: "Mem. (ink in) I might, Deo Volente, one day try my hand at a version of the Imit. in Biblical style, so far as it is given to my power." Or "Revise Pastoral; and get buttons, if any possible chance." Francis himself did not doubt his position as a Churchman. The boast he makes in "The Lily of the King" is more than many a bishop would venture.

St Francis, dining one day on broken bread, with a large stone for table, cried out to his companion: "O brother Masseo, we are not worthy so great a treasure." When he had repeated these words several times, his companion answered: "Father, how can you talk of

treasure where there is so much poverty, and indeed a lack of all things? For we have neither cloth, nor knife, nor dish, nor table, nor house; neither have we servant nor maid to wait upon us." Then said St Francis: "And this is why I look upon it as a great treasure, because man has no hand in it, but all has been given us by Divine Providence, as we clearly see in this bread of charity, in this beautiful table of stone, in this clear fountain." Did Francis Thompson mate so happy a Poverty? She whom he took in marriage was a very shrew in comparison. In place of rocky platforms she gave him the restaurant's doubtful table-cloth, or maybe he ate from paper bags. Broken bread that is appetising in Umbria is poor eating in Soho; and Francis never drank from the clear stream. But for all that I remember his asserting, with utmost conviction in his voice, the excellence of the viands set before him in a very unengaging shop in Westbourne Grove. "Here, Ev., I get what I like," I can hear him say; "here the beef is always good; excellent, Evie, excellent, I say."[1] Both Francises said that happiness was stored in self-denial, but Francis of Assisi was the quicker to make good his statement by immediate happiness. The same desires, the same secret, the same grace possessed two men wedded at least into the same family. The con-

[1] It may also be observed in passing that, while he was more experienced in privation than were any of his friends, Francis could be fastidious. It is still told of him in Sussex, where a clever cook attended his invalided appetite, that he would make great demonstrations at the mere sight of a dish he disapproved. Laying down his knife and fork, this frank guest would proclaim against one of the several viands. "Miss Laurence, I *hate* mutton!" The piled-up emphasis of his voice made such a sentence tremendously effective. "Wilfrid," he once said to my father, "Wilfrid, the Palace Court food is *shocking!*"

trast is between their two ladies rather than themselves. She whom the Saint courted in the stony fields

> Where clear
> Through the thin trees the skies appear,
> In delicate spare soil and fen,
> And slender landscape and austere,

was not the modern maiden—

> Ah ! slattern, she neglects her hair,
> Her gown, her shoes. She keeps no state
> As once when her pure feet were bare—

with whom the poet of London kept company. At times when he was most ill and thin and cold and lonely, his laugh, on joining friends, would outdo theirs for jollity; and, with the unjoyful appetite of a man whose every organ was out of order, he offered a grace before meat far longer than customary among the grateful and pious, a grace so long that his food would get cold while he muttered; so long that he would sometimes seem to imagine it was at an end before the right moment, and take up his knife and fork to start his meal, only, on remembering an omission, to lay them down again until the end of his whispered thanksgiving.

To the Serendipity Shop—the venture of a friend in Westbourne Grove—he would often go, but never with any curiosity as to the varied prints, books, and autographs with which it was stocked. Some one thing would catch his eye, and be discussed, but nobody I have known had less of the mere passion for acquisition. He collected nothing, and presents were acceptable to him but as the outward signs of kindliness: the

meaning having once reached him, he had little use for the means. At no time did he possess a book-case, nor sufficient books to crowd the slenderest shelf. A man less encumbered could hardly be discovered in this work-a-day world. All he left at his death was a tin box of refuse—pipes that would not draw, unopened letters, a spirit lamp without a wick, pens that would not write, a small abundance of rubbish that remained merely because he had neglected to throw it away. But his authors were no less his own because he had not put them on his shelf, or his autograph upon the fly-leaf.

Physical self-denial, disregard of personal luxuries, are but the manifestations of a spiritual state, of the state recommended by Christ: " Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven." For the practical Saint this state has its pressing calls. He puts his virtue to the proof; he embraces the leper, he lectures the birds, he is a man of action; his remotest and most spiritual experiences take on actuality; the Passion puts its mark upon his hands, and feet, and side. The poet, also pierced, has no credentials. A man of inaction, he passes the leper unnoticed, and he is too shy, too little a man of the world, to preach to the practical sparrows of the Edgware Road. Though nearly a Franciscan, and learned in the difficult arithmetic of subtraction, he is necessarily not apt in the good works of the Master.

Yet the poet's works are absolute good works. He is a missionary even if he never helps with gift or look or touch another man's distress. Like the prayers of the Trappist which neither clothe the naked nor feed the hungry, his rhymes have their absolute uses; they

are for ever re-stating and re-establishing the permanent values. Francis Thompson's consciousness of Good and Evil is alone as profitable as the Bills of half a dozen Ministries. And his consciousness of Good and Evil had been less strong had he known only the alloyed good and mitigated evil of active life, instead of knowing, in contemplation, their primaries.

Something, as rigorous as the vows of a monk, bound him to his manner of life. He misused all the conveniences of existence; sought no shelter from cold, kept no easy hours, mismanaged his food, his work, his rest. He was without the Silurist's daily ecstasies and special Sunday " shoots of bliss: Heaven once a week." Thompson's Sundays were as dreary as Kilburn and a missed Mass could make them.

Bound to so comfortless a way of living the modern man, he held, was absolved from other penances:—

" To our generation uncompromising fasts and severities of conduct are found to be piteously alien; not because, as rash censors say, we are too luxurious, but because we are too intricate, nervous, devitalised. We find our austerities ready-made. The east wind has replaced the discipline, dyspepsia the hair-shirt. . . . Merely to front existence is a surrender of self, a choice of ineludibly rigorous abnegation."

Such is the main argument of his *Health and Holiness*. But it is probable that he generalised too liberally from his own disabilities. Tortures were not invented and practised because a robuster past could make light of them. The rack was always agonising, or it had never been used. The sailor who bore his 300 lashes in 1812 probably felt them as keenly as a sailor would feel them

now. East winds penetrated hair-shirts. Man was the same, save that in greater saintliness he was ready to endure, and in greater cruelty was willing to inflict, more pain.

Capitulation such as Thompson's to a sordid environment may mean too great a severance from other things: "The perceptions of the spirit," as he confessed, "are not indefinitely credible and sufficing without the occasional confirmation and assurance of the body." The confirmation made to him was fined down to the minimum. True, one sunrise sufficed for five years of idolatry. He could strike a fair balance for his spiritual load with a few crumbs of actuality. It would seem that the greater the spiritual load the smaller the range of corporeal experience necessary for the nice adjustment of the scales. Yet the adjustment must be perfect. One of his many analogies for the interlocking of our complementary natures is as follows: "Holiness is an oil which increases a hundredfold the energies of the body, which is as the wick. Important that this wick shall not needlessly be marred during preparation through some toughening ascetic process which must inflict certain injury. The flame is dependent after all on the corporeal wick." He argued, further, from Manning's longevity and energy, that the more copious and pure the oil, the more persistently and brightly does the wick burn. The energising potentialities of sanctity he illustrates in the great works accomplished by St Francis despite the constant haemorrhage of the stigmata.

CHAPTER XIV

COMMUNION AND EXCOMMUNION

IF renunciation is the better part of possession, Francis states very clearly that compulsion must have no hand in it, if it is to be profitable. He writes under the heading, " A distraught maiden complaineth against enforced virginity "—

> Cold is the snow of the thawless valleys,
> Chill as death is the lily's chalice,
> Only she who seeks the valleys
> Groweth roses amid the snow.

And he reiterated that spiritual experiences do not endure without from time to time falling back upon their base for supplies, " the confirmation and assurance of the body."[1] That the lines of communication were cut was a pressing grief. I have seen the sense of isolation come up against him, hold him, and shake him. At such times he would be within sight of children, and though no angels then " snatched them from him by the hair," he could be conscious that he was less near them than their relatives. His praises of domestic relationships ring with the note of one whose comprehension is sharpened by the desire of things out

1 " Bodily being is the analogy of the soul's being; our temporal is our only clue to our spiritual life "; our fleshly senses the only medium for our divine experience. We are the symbols of ourselves. To such thoughts he adds disjointed notes in confirmation from the ancient mythologies: " Bird-heads to gods with man-bodies."—" Zeus=Sky."

of reach. In an incomplete "Ballad of Judgment" a man, marvelling at his rewards in Heaven, asks:—

> O when did I give Thee drink erewhile
> Or when embrace Thine unseen feet?
> What gifts Thee give for my Lord Christ's smile,
> Who am a guest here most unmeet?

And the answer comes:—

> When thou kissedst thy wife and children sweet,
> (Their eyes are fair in My sight as thine)
> I felt the embraces on My feet
> (Lovely their locks in thy sight, and Mine).

Other verses of the same unpublished ballad, though imperfect, enforce the idea:—

> If a toy but gladden his little brothers
> (A touch in caress to a child's hair given)
> Young Jesus' hands are filled with prayers
> (Sweep into music all strings of Heaven).

And further that

> . . . . for his sweet-kissed wife
> God kissed him on his blissful mouth.

Allegories of a happy road from bodily to heavenly experience fill many a more complex passage; here it is given with Chap-book directness.

Elsewhere he closely regrets his loneliness, and repudiates the merit of its heroism in this epitaph:—

> *Here lies one who could only be heroic.*
>
> How little, in the sifted judgement, seems
> That swelling sound of vanity! Still 'tis proved
> To be heroic is an easier thing
> Than to be just and good. If any be
> (As are how many daily ones!) who love

With love unlofty through no lofty days
Their little simple wives, and consecrate
Dull deeds with undulled justice: such poor livers,
Though they as little look to be admired
As thou look'st to admire, are of more prizeful rate
Than he who worshipped with unmortal love
A nigh unmortal woman, and knew to take
The pricking air of snowy sacrifice.

Being without the occasional "confirmation," he yearned for it; without that particular chance of being daily just and good, he saw in it the sum of life's purpose. And when he was threatened with the approach of too close affection, he grew alarmed, crying:—

Of pleasantness I have not any art
In this grief-erudite heart.

. . . . . .

O Sweet! no flowers have withered on my hair,
For none have wreathed them there;
And not to me, as unto others' lots,
Fell flowerful youth, but such the thorns that bare
Still faithful to my hair.
O sweet! for me pluck no forget-me-nots,
But scoop for me the Lethe water dull
Which yields the sole elixir that can bless—
Utter forgetfulness—
And I shall know that thou art pitiful.

Another form of his painful, elaborate, and even disingenuous attitude towards happiness was distrust. "All life long he had been learning how to be wretched," he quotes from Hawthorne, "and now, with the lesson thoroughly at heart, he could with difficulty compre-

hend his little airy happiness "; then, continuing in his own verse:—

> In a mortal garden they set the poet
> With mortal maiden and mortal child;
>
> . . . . . .
>
> In a mortal garden they set the poet;
> As a trapped bird he breathed wild.
> He had smiled in sorrow: not now he smiled.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> But into the garden pacing slowly,
> Came a lady with eyes inhuman. . . .
> And the sad slow mouth of him smiled again.
> This lady I know, and she is real,
> I know this lady, and she is Pain!

The Lady Pain figures, in one sense, in "Love in Dian's Lap." His only real love was itself a thing most strictly circumscribed; it existed only to be checked:—

"I yielded to the insistent commands of my conscience and uprooted my heart—as I supposed. Later, the renewed presence of the beloved lady renewed the love I thought deracinated. For a while I swung vacillant. I thought I owed it to her whom I loved more than my love of her finally to unroot that love, to pluck away the last fibres of it, that I might be beyond treachery to my resolved duty. And at this second effort I finished what the first had left incomplete. The initial agony had really been decisive, and to complete the process needed only resolution. But it left that lady still the first, the one veritable, full-orbed, and apocalyptic love of my life. Through her was shewn me the uttermost of what love could be—the possible divinities and celestial prophecies of it. None other could have taught them quite thus, for none other had in her the like unconscious latencies of utter spirituality. Surely she will one day realise them, as by her sweet, humble, and stainless life she has deserved to do."

Of one consolation he writes to her:—

"The concluding words of your letter, 'friend and child,' reminded me of some lines written at the time I was composing 'Amphicypellon.' They were written hastily to relieve an outburst of emotion; and, not thinking there was any poetry in them worthy of you, I never showed them you. But when I read those concluding words of your letter, I resolved to transcribe them that you might see you could not have addressed me more according to my wish:

Whence comes the consummation of all peace,
And dignity past fools to comprehend,
In that dear favour she for me decrees,
Sealed by the daily-dullèd name of Friend,—
Debased with what alloy,
And each knave's cheapened toy.
This from her mouth doth sweet with sweetness mend,
This in her presence is its own white end.
Fame counts past fame
The splendour of this name;
This is calm deep of unperturbèd joy.

Now, Friend, short sweet outsweetening sharpest woes!
In wintry cold a little, little flame—
So much to me that little!—here I close
This errant song. O pardon its much blame!
Now my grey day grows bright
A little ere the night;
Let after-livers who may love my name,
And gauge the price I paid for dear-bought fame,
Know that at end,
Pain was well paid, sweet Friend,
Pain was well paid which brought me to your sight."

Pain he proclaimed a pleasure. Why, then, did he call his pains a sacrifice? "Delight has taken Pain to her heart" was the sum of St Francis's teaching on a

subject dear to the guest at the Franciscan monastery gates. He himself wrote a commentary on St Francis:

"Pain, which came to man as a penalty, remains with him as a consecration; his ignominy, by a Divine ingenuity, he is enabled to make his exaltation. Man, shrinking from pain, is a child shuddering on the verge of the water, and crying, 'It is so cold!' How many among us, after repeated lessonings of experience, are never able to comprehend that there is no special love without special pain! To such St Francis reveals that the Supreme Love is itself full of Supreme Pain. It is fire, it is torture; his human weakness accuses himself of rashness in provoking it, even while his soul demands more pain, if it be necessary for more Love. So he revealed to one of his companions that the pain of his stigmata was agonising, but was accompanied by a sweetness so intense as made it ecstatic to him. Such is the preaching of his words and example to an age which understands it not. Pain is. Pain is inevadible. Pain may be made the instrument of joy. It is the angel with the fiery sword guarding the gates of the lost Eden. The flaming sword which pricked man from Paradise must wave him back."

The something awry, the disordering of sympathy, the distorting perspective, is hard to name. Perhaps loneliness, perhaps disease, perhaps his poetry, perhaps the devil. But it was there—a distemper, with his own discomfort for its worst symptom. In a letter to A. M.:

". . . I have suffered from reticence all my life: the opening out of hearts and minds, where there is confidence, puts an end to so much secret trouble that would grow monstrous if it were brooded over."

And again:—

"Dear Mrs. Meynell,—I have been musing a little on the theme mentioned between us this afternoon; and some frequent thoughts have returned to me—or, I should

say, recollections of frequent experience. (The theme I mean is the difficulty of communicating oneself. By the way, R. L. S.'s theme is more distinct from yours than I quite realised this afternoon. His is sincerity of intercourse, yours is rather adequacy of intercourse, and the two, though they may overlap and react on each other, are far from identical.) But the thoughts of which I speak (they are but one or two) are as useless to myself as pebbles would be to a savage, who had neither skill to polish them nor knowledge whether they were worth the polishing. So I am moved to send them to the lapidary. If anything should appear in them worth the saying, how glad I would be that it should find in you a sayer. But it is a more possible chance that poor thoughts of mine may, by a beautiful caprice of nature, stir subtle thoughts in you. When branches are so thickly laden as yours, a child's pebble may bring down the fruit.

" First, then, there is one obstacle to communication which exists little, if at all, for the generality, but is omnipresent with the sensitive and meditative who are destitute of nimble blood. I mean the slow and indeterminate beginnings of their thought. For example, such a person is looking at a landscape. Her (suffer me to use the feminine pronoun—it takes the chill off the egotism of the thing, to assume even by way of speech, that in analysing my own experience I am analysing yours) companion asks her, ' What are you thinking of ?' A child under such circumstances (to illustrate by an extreme antithesis) would need no questioning. Its vivid, positive thoughts and sensations have to themselves a glib and unpremeditated voice. But she ? She is hardly thinking: she is feeling. Yet ' feeling ' is too determinate and distinctive a term: nay, her state is too sub-intellectual for the term to be adequate. It is sensoriness instinct with mind; it is mind subdued to sensoriness. She feels in her brain. She thinks at her periphery. It is blended twilight of intellect and sensation; it is the crepuscular of thought. It is a state whose one possible utterance would be music.

Thought in this subtle stage cannot pass into words because it lacks the detail; as the voice, without division, cannot pass into speech; as a smooth and even crystal has no brilliance. To that ' What are you thinking of ?' she can only answer ' Nothing ' or ' Nothing in particular,' and not unlikely, her companion, seeing that she was full of apparent thought, is discouraged at what seems her unsympathetic reticence. Yet she longed to utter herself, and envied the people who, at a moment's notice, can take a rough pull of their thoughts. If one could answer, ' Stay a while, till my thoughts have mounted sufficiently to burst their dykes.'—But no: by that time his interest would have faded, and her words would find him listless. She towers so high to stoop on her quarry, that the spectator loses sight of her, and thinks she has lost sight of *it*. And the habit so engendered makes one slow of speech apart from slowness of thought. One cannot at the first signal *mobilise* one's words. How one wonders at the men who, with an infinitely smaller vocabulary, have it always on a war-footing, and can instantly concentrate on a given subject.

" Another point is that power of communication in oneself is conditioned by power of receptiveness in others. The one is never perfect; neither, therefore, can the other be. For entire self-revelation to another, we require to feel that even the weak or foolish impulsive things we may let drop, will be received without chill,—nay, even with sympathy, because the utterer is loved. That priceless ' other's ' principle must be (to parody Terence without an attempt at metre) *Tuus sum, nil tuum mî alienum puto*. But such an ' other ' is not among men—no, nor women either. The perfectest human sympathy is only the least imperfect. Then again, when we *can* communicate ourselves by words, it may often become a sensible effort to a sensitive person through the mere dead weight of language, the gross actualities of speech:—exactly as to delicate *you* a lovely scene loses half its attraction, if it must be reached by the fatigue of walking to it. Finally, I think there is the fact

that, in what concerns their veritable spirit, all mortals are feminine. In the mysteries of that inner *Bona Dea*, speech is male, and may not enter. We feel that we could only admit to them the soft silence of sight. But then—we cannot say: 'Draw aside my flesh and see.' Would we could!

"That reminds me of what you alluded to about the inefficiency of the eyes. I am so glad you mean to touch on that. I see much about the superior eloquence of eyes, &c. But it always seems to me they have just the eloquence of a foreign tongue, in which we catch only enough significance from the speaker's tone and the casual sound of some half-familiar word to make us pained and desperate that we can comprehend no more. There is a turn in Seneca—

> Illi mors gravis incubat,
> Qui, nimis notus omnibus,
> Ignotus moritur sibi.

'On him death lies heavy, who, too known of all, dies unknown to himself.'—'Too known of all!'—with myself I am but too intimate; and I profess that I find him a dull boy, a very barren fellow. Your Delphic oracles notwithstanding, a man's self is the most unprofitable acquaintance he can make; let him shun such scurvy companions. But, 'nimis notus omnibus!' If this were the most likely terror death could yield, O Lucius Annæus!—who is known to *one?* In that *Mare Clausum* of our being, sealed by the conventing powers of birth and death, with life and time acceding signatories, what alien trafficker has plied? Far heavier, *Luci mi*, death weighs on him who dies too known of himself, and too little of any other man. I have bored you, I feel, unpardonably.

"Repentantly your FRANCIS THOMPSON.

"But my repentance does not extend to suppressing the letter, you observe. A most human fashion of penitence!"

But though to be "too little known of any man" was in his case a complaint justified fully as constantly, he must needs have been aware, too, of the intimacy existing between a poet and his readers. As for the reader: to be such an one you must sign articles with your master-poets; sit, idly perhaps, in their workshops, and one day you find yourself promoted from apprentice to partner. Their obscurities are your limitations, your limitations their obscurities, and you and they must have it out between you. And even at the moment when the Poet is most obscure, he is most plain with you, most intimate, most dependent on your personal understanding and acceptance. Then most of all does he give you his confidence, have faith in your faith; then, most of all, does the anchor of his meaning need the clutch of your understanding, the kite of his fancy need the tail of your comprehension. Riding the waves and flying in the winds of thought, he were lost without you:—

> We speak a lesson taught we know not how,
> And what it is that from us flows
> The hearer better than the utterer knows.

The silence in which he was most unhappy was a silence in poetry. Comparing his case to the earth's life in winter, "tearless beneath the frost-scorched sod," he writes:—

> My lips have drought, and crack,
> By laving music long unvisited.
> Beneath the austere and macerating rime
> Draws back constricted in their icy urns
> The genial flame of Earth, and there
> With torment and with tension does prepare
> The lush disclosures of the vernal time.

His second period of melancholy was the more severe; he thought he saw in it, against all his convictions in regard to the rhythm or the resurrections of life, the signs of his poetry's final death. He suffered the torment and the tension in preparation for what he was convinced would be still-born song. The depression first came upon him with the publication of *New Poems*. " Though my aims are unfulfilled, and my place is insecure, many things warn me that with this volume I am probably closing my brief poetic career." He had already written of himself as one

> Whose gaze too early fell
> Upon her ruinous eyes and ineludible.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> And first of her embrace
> She was not coy, and gracious were her ways,
> That I forgot all Virgins to adore.
> Nor did I greatly grieve
> To bear through arid days
> The pretty toil of her divine delays;
> And one by one to cast
> Life, love, and health,
> Content, and wealth
> Before her, thinking ever on her praise,
> Until at last
> Nought had I left she would be gracious for.

In " The Sere of the Leaf," an early poem written at the end of 1890, he answers Katharine Tynan, a poet who had spoken of a full content:—

> I know not equipoise, only purgatorial joys,
> Grief's singing to the soul's instrument,
> And forgetfulness which yet knoweth it doth forget;
> But content—what is content ?

Forsaken, he doubled his complaints. Of many lamentations for his muse, the following lines to W. M. have a personal bearing:—

> Ah, gone the days when for undying kindness
> I still could render you undying song !
> You yet can give, but I can give no more;
> Fate, in her extreme blindness,
> Has wrought me so great wrong.
> I am left poor indeed;
> Gone is my sole and amends-making store,
> And I am needy with a double need.
>
> Behold that I am like a fountained nymph,
> Lacking her customed lymph,
> The longing parched in stone upon her mouth,
> Unwatered by its ancient plenty. She
> (Remembering her irrevocable streams),
> A Thirst made marble, sits perpetually
> With sundered lips of still-memorial drouth.

" I shall never forget when he told me," writes Wilfred Whitten, " under the mirrored ceiling of the Vienna Café that he would never write poetry again."

One may argue that Thompson must have been happy on the score of his poetry. As a poet, no doubt, he was; but not necessarily as a man. The two states did not overlap. He says in a letter to a friend that he did not realise that *Sister Songs*, so poor a thing, would give pleasure; whereas in verse he speaks of sending it exultingly. His " I have no poetry " is like the communicant's " I am unworthy," but is the prelude to the embrace. In the " To a Broom Branch at Twilight " (*Merry England*, November 1891), he declares that there are songs in the branches—

> I and they are wild for clasping,
> But you will not yield them me.

The thought that silence is the lair of sound was his own ample consolation for other unproductive periods: but now as he grew ill and really silent he felt that silence could nurture only silence.

His pride faces his distress; they stare each other out of countenance. It is certain that he often joined in George Herbert's address to a Providence who has made man "the secretary of her praise," though "beasts fain would sing," and "trees be tuning on their native lute":—

> Man is the world's high-priest; he doth present
> The sacrifice for all; while they below
> Unto the service mutter an assent
> Such as springs use that fall, and winds that blow.

And against the many contrary passages may also be set this of Thompson's on the poet's happiness:—

> What bitterness was overpaid
> By one full verse! world's love, world's pelf
> I filliped from me, and but prayed
> Boon of my scantly yielded self.

Here the "curse of destinate verse" reads like a blessing. Yet, strictly speaking, he found that unwritten predestinate verse means an ill case:—

> For ever the songs I sing are sad
> With the songs I never sing.

His complaint is not against the verse that gets written, which even when sad of origin is a boon: "Deep grief or pain, may find, and has in my case found, immediate outlet in poetry." Moreover, his inner consciousness buzzed with the certainty of his poetic gravity and significance. He trusted the quality of the poetry

within him as an ordinary man trusts the beat of his pulse and counts upon it. There were anxieties of composition and, of course, the ebb and flow of satisfaction in himself and a final despair. But before that he had known that he was, and he still knew that he had been, a poet. That is why he is so often the laureate of his own verse—

> Before mine own elect stood I,
> And said to Death:—' Not these shall die.'
> I issued mandate royally.
> I bade Decay:—' Avoid and fly;
> For I am fatal unto thee.'
>
> I sprinkled a few drops of verse,
> And said to Ruin, ' Quit thy hearse':
> To my loved, ' Pale not, come with me;
> I will escort thee down the years,
> With me thou walk'st immortally.'

These vaunting rhymes were written that he might go on to declare his undoing, being now stripped of his songs. In exquisite lines, lamenting their desertion, he begs his muses to stay their flight, and his exquisite lines belie the convention that they have flown, that the shrines of his heart are empty.

Wilfred Whitten, speaking of the poet's satisfaction in that his poetry was immortal, quotes:—

> The sleep-flower sways in the wheat its head,
> Heavy with dreams, as that with bread;
> The goodly grain and the sun-flushed sleeper
> The reaper reaps, and Time the reaper.
>
> I hang 'mid men my needless head,
> And my fruit is dreams, as theirs is bread:
> The goodly men and the sun-hazed sleeper
> Time shall reap, but after the reaper
> The world shall glean of me, me the sleeper!

And he adds: "When Francis Thompson wrote these verses, he did not indulge a fitful or exalted hope; he expressed the quiet faith of his post-poetic years. Thompson knew that above the grey London tumult, in which he fared so ill, he had hung a golden bell whose tones would one day possess men's ears. He believed that his name would be symphonised on their lips with Milton and Dryden and Keats. This he told me himself in words too quiet, obscure, and long ago for record. But he knew that Time would reap first."

The poet is important, present, manifest to the poet. His poetry is an addition to his state, which yet is complete without it. The state of poetry, the state of the poet, has superfluity escaping into song. It is this superfluity that makes, not the poet, but the poetry-book. If Thompson had only written of his experiences as a poet, he would have written fine poetry; when he wrote of the poet's songs he made songs, when he wrote of the poet's communings with God and Nature he made more songs, and, to make songs, need never have written expressly of God and Nature. In one sense his descriptions of the poet's throes are out of all proportion to the poet's product. He tells you so often of his Song, that it might be complained he had no time for singing. He will compose a poem to show he is Muse-forsaken, or to establish the fact that his lady is immortal only in his verse; it hardly matters whether he wrote otherwise of her or not. He will tell you, with supremest diction, that his poppy lies safe in leavèd rhyme, and in saying so writes the noblest verse of the poem bearing that name. The great bulk of his poetry is about his poetry—that is,

you might read his three volumes and think they were but prefaces to thirty-three. " The more a man gives his life to poetry, the less poetry he writes," was Thompson's own experience.

This harping upon himself is notable. It is not a matter of selfishness but of difference; he is proclaiming a family egoism that cannot be slighted merely because it defies scientific classification. It is known as madness, saintliness, obscurity, affectation, " nerves," mania, fanaticism, conceit, frustration, prophecy, or anarchy, according to its symptoms in a Blake, or a Jacopone da Todi; all its kinds are labelled, but it is never brought to exact order. The variousness of degree in the poetic character is a necessity of the case. The poet makes the difference because he makes his own world, his own scope, his own experience.

Pride of poetry, when Francis was forgetful of pride of pain, crops up in a hundred places; he writes, for instance, of Davidson's " The Testament of an Empire Builder ": " We still lament that here, as in the preceding poems of the series, there is far too much metrical dialectic, argument in verse, which is a thing anti-poetic. Poetry should proclaim, poetry is *dogmatic;* when it stoops to argue, it loses its august privilege and becomes, at the best, a K.C. in cloth of gold."

It was easily perceived Francis Thompson was not candidly and fully himself in common conversation. He was as much shut within his repetitions as the last little Chinese box is shut within a series of Chinese boxes. Lift all the lids and you find emptiness in the last. Francis insisted on your putting all the little

boxes back again, fitting the right lid on each, for, having made his point, he seldom failed to prove it backwards. Had he been of another age and race, he would have had an hermitage and been sought by those who wished instruction—the instruction that is not seldom done in silence. But who was ready to listen to Francis's silences in London? It is possible that if a child had sought him in Kensington Gardens, as he sat oblivious of the sparrows and the leaves and the nursemaids, and had asked for knowledge, revelation might have followed. We know that in the study at Lymington Patmore came to the conclusion that his visitor's prose was better than his poetry, his talk better than his prose. The windows of that Lymington study were thrown open to the ample airs of Heaven; in London lodgings the east winds made the noise outside, and Thompson's talk about the weather filled the air within. The Eastern must have communion, even the communion of silence, before he lights the lamp of common knowledge; Plato needed the magnetism of listeners and learners. Francis needed none but the absent, perhaps the unborn, reader. The shares he issued were all deferred shares.

And every stanza was an act of faith; every stanza a declaration of good-will. It is optimism that compels the poet to give the superfluity of his inner song to the world. He knows, perhaps against all common-sense, that the world will some day be fit for it. He launches the utmost treasures of his rare estate upon the nondescript audience. The pessimist either ceases writing (what is the use?), or, if he writes, cannot always be trusted to give his best to a posterity he despises. But

Francis gave out no secrets unless he had wrapt them in poetry. He bore them secretly, setting them free only when he had decked them in imagery. He was too busy making clothes against their birth for other companionship. Also, he was shy of his own inability to be communicative and shy of his own ardent emotions towards his friends:—

"I know how it must tax you" (he wrote to A. M.) "to endure me; for you are a friend, a mother; while I, over and above these, am a lover—spiritual as light, and unearthly as the love of one's angelic dreams, if you will—but yet a lover; and even a seraph enamoured must be a trying guardian angel to have to do with."

And again:—

"I am unhappy when I am out of your sight, but you, of course, can have no such feeling in reference to me. Now my sense of this inspires me with a continual timidity about inflicting my society on you in any way, unless you in some way signify a desire for it."

He inflicted his society on nobody. What he did inflict was the unaccomplished proxy of himself. Of the manner of his detachment he writes:—

"I do not know but, by myself, I live pretty well as much in the past and future as in the present, which seems a very little patch between the two. It has been more or less a habit through life, and during the last fifteen years, from the widened vantage of survey then gained, it has come to dominate my mental outlook."

With those he loved, his very backwardness was benevolent; his eye, often preoccupied, was never indifferent; neither careless nor trivial, it never sought an easy exchange of confidences, nor made friends by

suggestion of either tact or intelligence. He was a man who, if he did not enter into much intercourse, did not stand aloof through contempt or active disinclination, but for other, friendlier, reasons. He was unobtrusiveness personified, though that is a quality that hardly calls for personification. Neither he nor his room-mates would, as a rule, be at great pains to come together; but, even if you held no talk with him, he was sufficiently interesting or endearing to take your eye.

It was after an evening divided between silence and explanations that, wondering how well he covered up the fires of his imagination, one went to the door to help with hat and coat. Some final repetition, unblushingly proclaimed with " As I have said before," would still longer delay his return to himself; but once he had begun to go down the flights of steps in Granville Place (where we now lived) he would find himself face to face again with the realities of life that he chose to keep private, and be loudly talking to himself in a style more meaningful and threatening than any speech of his in company. Then the hall door would be slammed; and still in the silent street, past puzzled policemen, he would stride away in fierce agitation, but less solitary than when he sat among us. But a certain sweetness went with him too; he did not need to talk to stimulate that grateful mood of charity and peace that some know only when they can actually do works of mercy with their tongues and eyes. His gentle eye proved that not all his silent thoughts were troubled; and often his gaze would climb to some invisible and fair peak of contemplation, resting there content in silence.

Sometimes he was obviously happy in small-talk and in his companionships, but that was when commonplaces were not used solely as a shelter from the inconvenience of thoughts not commonplace. Even his half-penny paper, as he read it over in his tea-shop, was a root of happiness. He was fair game for the journalist of Lower Grub Street. Here is a random list of the things he cut from the *Daily Mail :* " Maria Blume's Will," " Insurance of Domestic Servants," " Help for the Householder," " *Mikado* Airs on Japanese Warship —Amusing Scenes," " Freaks of Weather: Startling Changes of Temperature," " The Milk Peril, What hinders Reform," and—with a little more margin to it, and straighter scissors-work—" Joy," a poem by Sturge Moore.

CHAPTER XV

THE CLOSING YEARS

AS he grew busier with journalism, and was helped to bread by it, he grew peevish with his prose, as other men do with a servant:—

"Prose is clay; poetry the white, molten metal. It is plastic, not merely to gross touch, but to the lightest breath, a wish, a half-talent, an unconscious feather-passage of emotional suggestion. The most instantaneously perfect of all media for expression. Instant and easy as the snap of a camera, perfect as star in pool to star above, natural as breathing of sweet air, or drinking of rain-fresh odours; where prose asks a certain effort and conscious shaping. But prose can be put in shafts (to its slow spoiling); verse, alack! hears no man's bidding, but serves when it lists,—even when it consents to lay aside its wings."

At times the everyday difficulties of journalism seemed insurmountable. Then would he write desperately of the necessity for cowardice on his part and a return to a mode of life that had no responsibilities:—

"Things have become impossible. B—— did not outright refuse me an advance on my poem, but told me to call again and 'talk it over.' . . . The only thing is for me to relieve you of my burthen—at any rate for the present—and go back whence I came. There will be no danger in my present time of life and outworn strength that I should share poor Coventry's complaint (that of outliving his ambition to live). . . . For the present, at any rate, good-bye, you dearest ones. If for longer—'Why, then, this parting was well made.'—Yours ever and whatever comes, FRANCIS THOMPSON."

During the years when such despairs were common, favours were forced upon a spasmodically reluctant poet, whose earnings seemed never at best to leave him a margin for incidental expenses: "To have to talk of money-matters to you is itself a misery, a sordidness. How much worse in its way all this must press on you is comprehensible to anyone. We are no longer as we were ten years ago. You have grown-up children to launch in life. . . ." For W. M. there was never a doubt of the honour and pleasure of his position. If Francis's rent fell sometimes in arrears, it was not because there was any falling-away in willingness, but because it had taken its place among the many liabilities of the master of a large household, and had to wait among them for its turn to be met. Again, to my father:—

". . . As for poetry, I am despondent when I am without a poetical fit, yet when I have one I am miserable on account of my prose. I came lately across a letter of Keats' (penned in the præ-Endymion days), which might almost word for word be written by myself about myself. It expresses exactly one of the things which trouble me, and make me sometimes despair of my career. 'I find' (he says), 'I find I cannot do without poetry—without eternal poetry; half the day will not do—the whole of it. I began with a little, but habit has made me a leviathan. I had become all in a tremble from not having written anything of late: the sonnet over-leaf did me good; I slept the better last night for it; this morning, however, I am nearly as bad again.' I, too, have been all in a tremble because I had written nothing of late. I am constantly expecting to wake up some morning and find that my Dæmon has abandoned me. I hardly think I *could* be very vain of my literary gift; for I so keenly feel that it is beyond my power to command, and may at any moment be taken from me."

This nervousness for his muse, like Rossetti's for his sight, came upon him more hardly in later years.

Misrepresentation was busy before his death. The word went round that the streets had put a worse slur than hunger, nakedness, and loneliness upon him. In 1906 a pamphlet reached him from the University Press, Notre Dame, Indiana, in which he read that he " had been raised out of the depths ":

> " No optimism of intent can overlook the fact of his having fallen, and no euphemism of expression need endeavour to cloak it. Down those few terrible years he let himself go with the winds of fancy, and threw himself on the swelling wave of every passion, desiring only to live to the full with a purpose of mind apparently like that of his contemporary, Oscar Wilde, but in circumstances how vastly different from those the brilliant young Oxford dandy knew. He said, ' I will eat of all the fruits in the Garden of Life,' and in the very satisfaction of his desire found its insatiableness."

That reader had found the proof of Thompson's wrong-doing even in " The Hound of Heaven." " I fled Him down the nights and down the days " could only mean that the runaway was a criminal, and the Almighty the policeman who hurries when he is sure of a crime. " The Hound of Heaven," a study in the profound science of renunciation, was said to be the work of a man who had " thrown himself on the swelling wave of every passion." In face of such misunderstanding, at the time of his death it was hardly surprising to read in the *Mercure de France* that " he went mad, and death happily put an end to his miseries," or to hear a Professor of Romance Languages

in Columbia University say that, "like Verlaine, Thompson is the poet of sin."

Since there was so little to go upon, it is hardly surprising that the alien onlooker's conception of Francis Thompson was a misconception. His poor living, his unknown lodging, his fugitive seclusion encouraged the legend that he was still an outcast. Since this alien had never heard him laugh, and to the ear's imagination it is easier to frame a cry, the subject of the ready-made legend never even smiled; there were no *fioretti* connected with his name, and the weeds were taken for granted. The heavy remorsefulness of his muse seemed, to such as are unfamiliar with the *confiteor* of the saints, to mark a more real repentance, and therefore real misconduct, than does the ordinary, facile *peccavi* of modern poetry-books. We notice that at his death the writers of the obituary notices who were ready with suggestions of evil days were equally ready with the usual liberal condonation. "No such condonation was called for—though by some it was offered—in the case of Francis Thompson," wrote my mother in the *Dublin Review*, January 1908. "For, during many years of friendship, and almost daily companionship, it was evident to solicitous eyes that he was one of the most innocent of men." To *The Nation*, November, 1907, "W. M." wrote his protest:—

"I see in the *Times* a paragraph about Francis Thompson, against which I will ask you to let me make appeal. It comes from 'A Correspondent,' who 'writes to us'; and I am just such another, writing to you. But I knew Thompson, and no pen but an alien's could have written this to Printing House Square: 'There are occasions on which the conventional expression of regret becomes a

mockery, and this is one of them. What the world must regret is not the release of Mr. Thompson, but the fact that the cravings of the body from which he is released should have had power to ruin one of the most remarkable and original of the poetic geniuses of our time.' I know what the writer insinuates. I know, too, that he has overshot his mark. But the public will only too greedily infer from his words that Thompson was a degraded man—he who carried dignity amid all vicissitude; that he was a debauchee—he who lived, as he sang, the votary of Fair Love. Nor need I adopt in his regard the fine passage in which Mr. Birrell defends Charles Lamb's ' drinking.' For Mr. Francis Thompson did not ' drink.' The ' genius ' of Francis Thompson was not ' ruined,' or we should not have the evidence of it on every page of three volumes, presenting together a body of best poetry equal in size to that of most of our poets. But it is true that Thompson's health was wretched from first to last. It is true also that he doctored himself disastrously with laudanum from almost the early days of his medical studentship in Manchester. When he came to the streets of London, the drug delivered him in a manner from their horrors, and, besides, was, I think, some palliation of the disease of which he finally died—consumption. . . . "

The argument of the poet's sanctity is in his poems; and it were tiresome to take the oath in the discredited witness-box of biography in denial of any particular accusation. But the circumstances that made imputation of evil likely and credible form part of the literary history of the period. The duet about commission of sin and contrition for sin had great vogue, and accounts for a deal of the poetry of self-accusation, made, not seldom, in regard to faked or spurious offences. Contrition was, after all, the main force at work, and, in the naked, truthful, and intense moments

of death, this was the ruling passion. The Church and the Sacraments were at the service of men who had fondly believed that their chief strength was in rebellion, and that they had strayed into ways of loss and salvation peculiar to themselves, but who ended by being sorry.

Religion seems always to be setting its beneficent ambush for those who thought themselves most securely on another road; but in the case of the victims of abnormal and distressful phases of experience there was something more than the splendid accident of reconciliation and forgiveness. One after another of the leaders of aesthetic disaffection and disease confessed to an almost involuntary inclination to seek the arms of the Church. The devil, prowling like a lion, might leap upon them, "but the Lamb, he leapeth too." Christ's actual presence, His miracles, His Hand, were for the sick, the afflicted, the wrongdoer: His inspiration to-day most often rests upon those intellectual sinners who have seemed in their misfortune to be puffing out the light of the world. And this was not only a death-bed reconciliation. What English artist for fifty years has made a "Madonna and Child"? Aubrey Beardsley made one. What poet had sung of the Last Sacraments? Ernest Dowson's most beautiful verses are on the Extreme Unction. Lionel Johnson, whom Thompson knew, had not been a rebel, and he did not seek a death-bed reprieve. Nevertheless his name connects one form of failure with the literary life of his day and with an ardent adherence to Religion. Another type of a school that had set out to use bad language but could say nothing finally but its prayers, is he who then sang in company with Baudelaire, but whose poet,

now he has become a priest, is Jacopone da Todi. So, too, with Simeon Solomon, as his reputation and his clothes became more ragged, who, as he grew "famous for his falls" but otherwise obscure, found a co-ordinating central inspiration for his work, and found it before the altars of the Carmelite Church in Kensington. Francis may well have jostled elbows with him there, or on the pavement.

The copper-plated Death of the sixteenth century is a caution no more gruesome or extreme than the picture of these poets and painters in their pains. Two or three to a lunatic asylum, one to death that smelt of suicide, and three at least to death hastened by drink—that is the hasty record of a certain group. Francis never met Wilde, the wit who stumbled and gasped the dull man's daily words of repentance, even before his audience was well aware of his jest; nor Beardsley, the artist who found death's quill at his heart before he had time to destroy the drawings which, in his agony, he learnt some devil rather than himself had made. To the hospitals, asylums, and prisons of London and Paris, to the Sanatorium of the Pacific or the Mediterranean, to the slums, and to starvation, Literature contributed numbers out of all proportion. But Francis knew hardly one of them.

Like the legend that seeks to give an evil or a sad account of men, is the easier legend of their laziness. All who have known joy and written vastly have been accused of inertia and despondency. It is true that Francis was apprenticed to Idleness of wits, as well as Industry; but, finding both hard masters, and Idleness (of the common sort) the harder, he much sought to

avoid it. As for his work (save in poetry) he knew few moments at which he could with Coleridge declare a happiness in difficulties, " feeling in resistance nothing but a joy and a stimulus." With Coleridge's other mood (" drowsy, self-distrusting, prone to rest, loathing his own self-promises, withering his own hopes —his hopes, the vitality, the cohesion of his being ") he was acquainted. But not long; the meaning of his inactivity would burst on him; then he construed his own defence into a hundred aphorisms. These two are signed with his initials:—

" Where I find nothing done *by* me, much may have been done *in* me," and

" For the things to-day done *in* you, will be done *by* you to-morrow many things."

Lying abed, he was acutely aware of his duty to get up. It was a conscious and laborious laziness, akin to Dr. Johnson's, whose great bulk was shaken with almost daily repentance for its sloth. The Dictionary makes our shelves creak in protest at the notion held by Johnson himself and his contemporaries that he was a lazy man; and the pile of Thompson's papers, his letters, and the following placard he pinned upon his bedroom wall, speak of his large industries and his girding at the spectre sloth:—

At the Last Trump thou wilt rise Betimes !
Up; for when thou wouldst not, thou wilt shortly sleep long.
The worm is even now weaving thy body its night-shift.
Love slept not a-saving thee. Love calls thee,
Rise, and seek Him early. Ask, and receive.

I leave unprinted other more piteous solicitations for what, virtually, though he did not guess it, was the energy and health he could not possess. Upon another sheet more worldly persuasions were set to urge his waking eye. Of a printer's request for copy on an earlier day than that usually covenanted he writes:—"Remember the new *Athenæum* dodge testifies against you."

It was he who found time to be pleased with Brearley's bowling or merry with the anticipation of the morrow; he, sitting in grey lodgings, who crowded into the chilly ten minutes before 3 A.M. the writing of a long letter to be posted, after anxieties with address and gum of which we know nothing, and a stumbling journey down dark stairs, in a pillar-box still black in threatening dawn. There are few such journeys of my own I can count to my credit, and few words I can remember, written or spoken, to set against his thronging puns and his constant sequence of "Yours ever." At any rate he was outdone at every turn—in kindness, attentions, sallies, patience and wit—by one among his friends, my father, who had to crowd his generosity to the poet between stretches of persistent overwork, the real thronging anxieties that were at least as pressing as Francis's imaginary ones. In reading a series of letters Francis wrote to me in the last years, I am sorry to think how slovenly must have been my response to his tenacious jesting. And it was he who troubled to make his notes kind and acceptable, neat and long. One marvels, among the mass of his journalism and letters, at the estimate of him that passed undisputed during his life, as a man who misspent his powers and

wasted his minutes as he wasted his matches. If he was unfortunate, he was also merry. Without excuse his biographer confesses to the moodiness, the silence, the disorderliness that is imputed to the poet. The consolation for all my family is the thought of my father's incessant care for and good humour towards him.

Of the hours he kept there are many legends, all made according to Greenwich time. But it is not expected of the lamp-lighter, or the contract-winder of office clocks, or the milkman, that he should write Thompson's poetry, or even read it, and yet we started with a wholly illogical desire of constraining Francis, if not to fulfil their duties, at least to be a party to their punctuality.

To look at, as it happens, he was something between a lamp-lighter and a man of letters, but nearer the lamp-lighter; unless, seeing him stand beneath a street gas-jet to write an overdue article, one noticed he carried a pencil instead of a pole. Thus were the flares of Brown's bookstalls in Bishop's Road used by him. On and on would he write until the last shutter was closed and the gas turned down. Then dashing off the final sentence, he would rush into the shop to sell his book, and to the pillar-box with his article.

Orpen desired to paint him; sittings were even appointed; but not till Neville Lytton encountered him under the same roof, at Newbuildings, was his elusive likeness caught by an artist. If he is to be sought for among the old masters, it is to El Greco that one would go. He had the narrow head and ardent eye that served that painter for Saint, Beggar, and Courtier. None other recalls his presence to me, or creates an atmosphere in which he could have lived. Rem-

brandt's was too rich and still, Tintoretto's too invigorating. Titian recognised no such pallor, Giorgione no such slightness, and Veronese no such shabbiness. For the Florentines, they were better built; their poets' countenances were more established and secure, and their excellent young men were less nervous and restless than he.

He alludes in a letter to a belief (principally, I believe, his own) that he resembled two Personages:—

"Dear Ev.,—Character counts, even in cricket. This morning I was looking at a *Daily Mail* photo. of the South African team for the coming cricket season. One of the faces instantly caught my eye. 'Well!' said I, 'if character count for anything in cricket, this should be the bowler they say has the Bosanquet style.' . . . Since Hall Caine is no Shakespeare, Plonplon no soldier, *and neither the Tsar nor the Prince of Wales* [*George V*] *are Thompsonian poets*, great was my surprise when I found the fellow *was* the Bosanquet bowler."

Had he compared his own youthful photographs with those of King George V he might perhaps have been confirmed in one of his impressions. But the only faces he much pondered were the poets'. Round the walls of his room he pinned the *Academy* supplements, full-page reproductions from the National Portrait Gallery; and with these was a reproduction given him by Patmore of Sargent's drawing of my mother. The supplements he liked all the better because they illustrated a favourite theory of facial angles. On foreheads he set no value; but insisted that genius was most often indicated by a protruding upper jaw. This did not mean for him that thick lips had significance, but where the bony structure from the base of the

nose to the upper teeth was thrust forward, as, notably, in Charlotte Brontë and Coventry Patmore, he found the character that interested him.

Here is another letter, written in a bad light but copious good spirits, before a visit to " the Serendipity Shop ":—

" Dear Ev.,—This to remind you I shall be at the shop, whereof the name is mystery which all men seek to look into, and in the mouth of the young man Aloysius [an assistant] doubtful is the explanation—yea, shuffleth like one that halteth by reason of the gout; in the forehead and forehand of the bland and infant day, yet swaddled in the sable bands of the first hour and the *pre-diluculum*. For the Wodensday, a kitten with its eyes still sealed, is laid in the smoky basket of night, awaiting the first homœopathic doses of the morn's tinctured euphrasy (even as euphrasia once cured an inflammation of my dim lid)."

Andrew Lang has complained of de Quincey's digressions; a further sample of Thompson's habitual guiltiness may be taken from one of the slightest of his notes:—

" Dear Ev.,—I told your father I should come to-morrow, but I send you a line to *mak siccar*—as the lover of artistic completion said who revised Bruce's murder of Red Comyn. It is interesting to see the tentative beginnings of the James school in Bruce, already at variance with the orthodox methods upheld by his critical collaborator. The critic in question considered that Bruce had left off too soon. But to Bruce's taste evidently there was a suggestion in the hinted tragedy of ' I doubt I have killed Red Comyn ' more truly effective than the obvious ending substituted by his *confrère*. History, by the way, has curiously failed to grasp the inner significance of this affair.

" I am quite run down to-night." . . .

"I had never your lightness of heart," he writes, adding:—

"Nor was I ever without sad overshadowings of the hurrying calamity. . . . 'The day cometh, also the night;' but I was born in the shadow of the winter solstice, when the nights are long. I belong by nativity to the season of 'heavy Saturn.' Was it also, I sometimes think, under Sagittarius? I am not astronomer enough to know how far the precession of the equinoxes had advanced in '58 or '59. Were it so it would be curious, for Sagittarius, the archer, is the Word. He is also Cheiron, the Centaur, instructor of Achilles. The horse is *intellect* or *understanding* (Pegasus = *winged intellect*). He is the slayer of Taurus the Bull (natural truth and natural or terrestrial power and generation, the fire of unspiritualised sense), which sinks as he rises above the horizon. Ephraim, a type or symbol of the Word (as Judah of the Fathers and the Priesthood), was an archer, or symbolised as such. (See Jacob's dying and prophetic blessing of his sons, wherein each has a symbol proper to his character and that of his tribe, indicating his place as a type in the Old Church, and in the foreshadowing of the New.) But this is very idle chatter, and I don't know how I fell upon it when my mind is serious enough, indeed. Perhaps the mind wanders, tired with heavy brooding."

But it is always the gay word that could best bear the scrutiny of the poet himself if he were to pass the proofs of his own biography. In writing of a life that has a superficial look of disaster and pain, his biographer has a shamefaced feeling of dishonesty. Every other word is, in a sense, a misrepresentation, and worse. The memory of his smile shouts out to them, "You liars!"

There was always courtesy in his notes, mixed with haste and complaints; and even he would weary of

bulletin prose, so that his needs and ailments sometimes came recorded in doggerel:—

I am aweary, weary, weary,
I am aweary waiting here!
Why tarries Everard? sore I fear he
Has forgotten my shirting-gear!
Ah, youth untender! why dost thou delay
With shirts to clothe me, an untimely tree
Unraimented when all the woods are green?
But thou delay not more: unboughten vests
Expect thy coming, shops with all their eyes
Wait at wide gaze, and I thy shepherd wait,
In Tennysonian numbers wooing haste . . .

Of great value is my mother's corrective record of his laugh:—

"He has been unwarily named with Blake as one of the unhappy poets. I will not say he was ever so happy as Blake;—but few indeed, poets or others, have had a life so happy as Blake's, or a death so joyous; but I affirm of Francis Thompson that he had natural good spirits, and was more mirthful than many a man of cheerful, of social, or even of humorous reputation. What darkness and oppression of spirit the poet underwent was over and past some fifteen years before he died. It is pleasant to remember Francis Thompson's laugh, a laugh readier than a girl's, and it is impossible to remember him, with any real recall, and not to hear it in mind again. Nothing irritable or peevish within him was discovered when children had their laughter at him. It need hardly be told what the children laughed at;—say, a habit of stirring the contents of his cup with such violence that his after-dinner coffee was shed into the saucer or elsewhere—a habit which he often told us, at great length, was hereditary."

His laugh it is difficult to keep alive: the legend of his extinguished happiness is too strong. For laughter is commonly discredited; only Mr. Chesterton, for

example, persists in making the Almighty capable of humour. While we are all ready to allow that thorns make a crown, we hold that bells do no more than cap us—the cap and bells of folly. Who ever spoke of a crown of bells?

The refutation of the charge against his industry lies in his published work and in the pages of a hundred crowded note-books. The newspaper Odes alone are sufficient evidence of his power to compel even his muse to arduous and humble labours. These Odes were pot-boiling journalism; their inspiration by the clock and the column: "We have no doubt whatever that inspiration will not fail you for so great a subject—the Jubilee! We must have the copy by the afternoon of the 21st," wrote an encouraging editor (Mr. Massingham) on June 6, 1897. The Ode was written within three weeks, and probably in the last three hours of them. From Mr. Garvin came another letter which made reference to "the empyrean, where the Thompsonian Ode sails with one supreme dominion through the azure deeps of air—vital, radiant, lovely."

In a letter to his sister about the Jubilee Ode, Francis says:—

"Thereon forthwith followed the severe and most unhappy cab accident about which I informed you. . . . I have had a year of disasters. You will notice a new address (39 Goldney-road, Harrow-road, N.W.) at the head of this letter. I have been burned out of my former lodgings. The curtain caught fire just after I had got into bed, and I upset the lamp in trying to extinguish it. My hands were badly blistered, and I sustained a dreadful shock, besides having to walk the streets all night. The room was quite burned out."

This letter he never posted, so that his sister, the nun, writes out of her unwearied solicitude two years later:—

"My dear Frank,—Doubtless you will be surprised to receive a letter from me after so long a silence. But the apparent negligence is not my fault, for I have been trying for twelve months past to obtain your address, and only succeeded about a fortnight ago. You see, my dear brother, I have no one to give me any information of you, and as *you* never write to me the consequence is I am utterly in the dark. My life is very uneventful, therefore my letters to you must, I know, be very uninteresting; but they must just show you that you have still got a sister who loves you and thinks of you and also prays much for your well-being here and hereafter."

Very often he would decide for an eight-hour day, and offer himself, through my father, to the journals. Like most men who find work irksome when they have it, and delay all commissions, he imagined, when he had none, that the difficulty was in the getting. "The *Academy* should not and shall not have a monopoly of me," he writes, without any provocation from the *Academy*. "Take this chance for me now"—when we had mentioned the *Daily Chronicle* as an opening. "Bite a cherry while it bobs against your mouth." Nor were his reasons for complaint against his journalistic fate always ungrounded. The *Academy* demanded no monopoly, being willing to accept his unpunctual copy whenever it arrived, and in almost any quantity; but elsewhere minor reverses were made the most of. He writes:—

"I have just got home. The *Imperial and Colonial Magazine* asked me to submit 'one or two poems' of an Imperialist nature. I sent them one, as you know. They

have rejected it. If the poem sent through you is also rejected (as I expect) I shall give up. I cannot go on here—or anywhere else—under these circumstances. Try as I will, all doors are shut against me. If your poem miscarries —that is the end."

Thus were his fears communicated to the person who made them futile and absurd. But Thompson would never forgo them.

He continued fitfully on the *Academy*, but gradually transferred his allegiance to the *Athenæum*. In the meantime my father arranged that a publishing house whose literary adviser he was should supply him with work that could be done at any time and be paid for at any moment. *The Life of St Ignatius* was commissioned. He delivered every few pages as he finished them—three were passport to a pound—and, so final was his method of composition, he neither desired nor needed to see a single page of the manuscript again. The reviewing my father obtained for him on the *Athenæum* he did with success till within a month or two of his death. Letters such as this from Vernon Rendall illustrate the courtesy of his editors: "ATHENÆUM OFFICE, *December* 20, 1905. Do not hurry now about anything you have. You are sure to be in need of rest and recreation—which, indeed, is supposed to be the fair perquisite of all at this season."

And, later, from another office:—

"THE NATION, *April* 9, 1907.—DEAR MR. THOMPSON,—Mrs. Meynell will have sent you a letter of mine about the beautiful poem [' The Fair Inconstant '] which you wrote for us last week, and about the more elaborate work, which, in continuance of old *Daily Chronicle* days, you might be willing to do for us. I have always retained the utmost

admiration for your poetic genius, and regard with much warmth its association with a paper like the *Nation*.—Yours very truly, H. W. MASSINGHAM."

Of another literary enterprise which, like his journalism, shows that he could be diligent, he writes:—

"I have summoned up pluck to send my little play[1] to W. Archer, asking him whether it afforded any encouragement to serious study of writing for the stage. His answer is unfavourable—though he refrains from a precise negative. This sets my mind at rest on that matter. None the less, I wanted to read you one or two bits from my chucked-up *Saul*, since they seemed to me better than I knew."

[1] This play is thus set forth on his MS. title-page:

NAPOLEON JUDGES, *A Tragedy in Two Scenes*

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

NAPOLEON. GENERAL AUGEREAU. MADAME LEBRUN (*an opera-dancer, Augereau's Mistress*). PRESIDENT OF THE COURT MARTIAL. A FRENCH DESERTER. OFFICERS. SOLDIERS. *Place*.—Augereau's Camp. *Time*.—The Italian Campaign of 1796. During the first scene Napoleon is absent from Augereau's Camp.

Of another class is a modern MS. comedy, full of laboriously smart give and take, called "*Man Proposes, but Woman Disposes*. Un Conte sans Raconteur. In Two Scenes."

CHAPTER XVI

LAST THINGS

FRANCIS'S health often dismayed him, and his terrors both in regard to sicknesses and politics covered many pages of threatening letters. The mere streets became more and more an oppression. Even Elgin Avenue grew (in 1900) as ugly to him as it always is to men less happily indifferent. At such times he could write in the strain of the following letters:—

"I designed to call in on Wednesday, but was sick with a horrible journey on the underground. To-day, though better, I am still not well. I hope I may manage to-morrow. I have been full of worry, depression, and unconquerable forebodings. The other day, as I was walking outside my lodgings, steeped in ominous thoughts, a tiny child began to sing beside me in her baby voice, over and over repeating:—

'O danger, O danger,
O danger is coming near!'

My heart sank, and I almost trembled with fear."

"Of course I will come in to-morrow night. Did I not, you might be sure I was knocked off my legs altogether, and I should feel that the world had gone off its hinges. I have never missed seeing you at Christmas save when I was at Pantasaph. Every happy wish to you, dear Wilfrid, and may God be as kind to you as you have ever been to me."

He prophesied of war, and was tormented whole days by complications in the East, and the notion of a Yellow invasion. And even West Kensington, when

small-pox was announced there, seemed to come marching on him, a Birnam forest of bricks. It was illness, with fear for a symptom. " Disaster was, and is, drawing downwards. . . . There are storm-clouds over the whole horizon, and I feel my private fate involved. I am oppressed with fatality," he writes in one letter (1900), and on the next page is involved in jokes which were heavy, not with fatality. Other letters contain complaints of dreams akin to Coleridge's: " A most miserable fortnight of torpid, despondent days, and affrightful nights, dreams having been in part the worst realities of my life."

On the engagement in 1903 of the Monica of " The Poppy," of " Monica Thought Dying," and of *Sister Songs*, Francis wrote to her:—

" Dear Monica,—Most warmly and sincerely I congratulate you on what is the greatest event in a woman's life —or a man's, to my thinking. . . . Extend to him, if he will allow me, the affection which you once—so long since—purchased with a poppy in that Friston field. ' Keep it,' you said (though you have doubtless forgotten what you said) ' as long as you live.' I have kept it, and with it I keep you, my dearest. I do not say or show much, for I am an old man compared with you, and no companion for your young life. But never, my dear, doubt I love you. And if I have the chance to show it, I will. But I am ill at saying all I doubtless should say to a young girl on her engagement. I have no experience in it, my Monica. I can only say I love you; and if there is any kind and tender thing I should have said, believe it is in my heart, though it be not here.—My dear, your true friend, Francis Thompson."

At her bidding, he went, on her marriage day, to the Church of St Mary of the Angels in Bayswater. He

had never, in all probability, failed a tryst before by coming to it too early, but to all her commands he was obedient, and his mistake was but the symptom of his anxiety to be present. The poppy that she picked and gave him, with "Keep it as long as you live," was found after his death in the leaves of his own copy of *Poems*—the only volume of his own works that he had kept by him. So were nearly all her injunctions to him observed. Having gone too early to church, he left too early, and wrote:—

"DEAREST MONICA,—You were a prophetess (though you needed not to be a sibyl) to foretell *my* tricks and manners. I reached the church just ten minutes after twelve, to find vacancy, as you had forewarned me. A young lady that might have been yourself approached the church by the back entrance, just as I came away; but on inspection she had no trace of poppy-land. There must have been other nuptial couples about, I think. It seems but the other day, my dearest sister (may I not call you so? For you are all to me as younger sisters and brothers—to me, who have long ceased practically to have any sisters of my own, so completely am I sundered from them), that you were a child with me at Friston, and I myself still very much of a child. Now the time is come I foresaw then—

> Knowing well, when some few days are over,
> You vanish from me to another.

You may pardon me if I feel a little sadness, even while I am glad for your gladness, my very dear. I was designing to call in to-night, till I learned from you that you would be occupied with your wedding-party. Then I hoped I might have got to you last night instead, but could not manage it. So, to my sorrow, I must be content only to write. Had I known before, I would

have called in on Sunday, at all costs, rather than defer it to (as it turns out) the impossible Wednesday.—Yours ever dearly, my dear, FRANCIS THOMPSON."

A few years before his death his manner had changed. His platitudes, now, were merely a means of getting through an evening without making a demonstration of the trouble he was in. That his ills might not be exposed he kept covering them up with talk, as constantly as a mother tucks in a child restless in fever. The man who always takes laudanum is always in need of it, and when he is in need he is ill. He is too ill to think, too uncomfortable to meditate or be wise. Whenever he postponed his dram, and spent his day instead with his friends, he would say an easy thing once, and, finding it easy, would say it over and over again. While he spent an evening explaining that last August was hot, but this hotter, his cry really was, " Where is my laudanum ?" Nor was his need only physical: his soul, too, was crying, " Where is my God, my Maker, Who giveth songs in the Night, Who teacheth us more than the beasts of the earth, and maketh us wiser than the fowls of Heaven ?" I am told by a doctor that one of the greatest pains of relinquishing opium is the sense of the reason's unfitness. Thought is thrown out of joint, and hurts like a dislocated shoulder.

" Nature," says Emerson, "never spares the opium or nepenthe, but wherever she mars her creature with some deformity or defect lays her poppies plentifully on the bruise." And even for the bruises made by poppies she has her salve. Some redress, a rebate of the price paid, was made to Francis Thompson for the agony of

the opium habit. That he seldom spoke of it meant that it was a thing too bitter to speak of; meant, too, that it was at times a thing too little to speak of, that Nature minimised its terrors. There is mercy for the slave of a bad habit: the more confirmed, the more often must there be periods during which its mastery is forgotten, even in its presence. The sorriest drunkard is not necessarily the drunkard oftenest sorry. The opium-eater is sometimes persuaded of his own invented theory of the causes of his weakness, of its uses and necessity. Francis, who would have loathed himself to the point of extinction, or redemption, if he had been an ordinary sinner, who would have found life with himself intolerable had he sullied life with common offences against the Law, was provided with some sort of protection against remorse for his own particular failing. Nature gave him poppies to set against poppies.

Periods of misery and dejection came to him, as to his fellows. With Coleridge he could in certain moods have written: " The stimulus of conversation suspends the terror that haunts my mind; but when I am alone, the horrors that I have suffered from laudanum, the degradation, the blighted utility, almost overwhelm me." And again in words very like de Quincey's, Coleridge speaks of " fearful slavery," of being " seduced to the accursed habit ignorantly." From the starker visitations of remorse Coleridge, too, was justly sheltered. His son has said for him: " If my Father sought more from opium than the mere absence of pain, I feel assured it was not luxurious sensations or the glowing phantasmagoria of passive dreams; but that

the power of the medicine might keep down the agitations of his nervous system, like a strong hand grasping the strings of some shattered lyre." His own " my sole sensuality was not to be in pain " is sufficient for himself and for others.

His comments on Coleridge's case are valuable, since they rebound in his own direction:—

" Then came ill-health and opium. Laudanum by the wine-glassful and half-pint at a time soon reduced him to the journalist-lecturer and philosopher, who projected all things, executed nothing; only the eloquent tongue left. So he perished—the mightiest intellect of the day, and great was the fall thereof. There remain of him his poems, and a quantity of letters painful to read. They show him wordy, full of weak lamentation, deplorably feminine and strengthless.... It is of the later Coleridge that we possess the most luminous descriptions. A slack, shambling man, flabby in face and form and character; womanly and unstayed of nature; torrentuous of golden talk, the poet submerged and feebly struggling in opium-darkened oceans of German philosophy, amid which he finally foundered, striving to the last to fish up gigantic projects from the bottom of a daily half-pint of laudanum. And over the wreck of that most piteous and terrible figure of all our literary history shines and will shine for ever the five-pointed star of his glorious youth; those poor five resplendent poems, for which he paid the devil's price of a desolated life and unthinkably blasted powers."

Even if Francis spilled brown laudanum on his paper as he wrote those superlatives, he did not fit the cap of disaster to two heads.

In 1906 he again visited the monastery at Crawley, where his friends had offered him hospitality over many

years, and helped him to keep an occasional feast. Before his departure Francis wrote to me:—

"... I feel depressed at going away from you all—it seems like a breaking with my past, the beginning of I know not what change, or what doubtful future. Change *as* change is always hateful to me; yet my life has been changeful enough in various ways. And I have noticed these changes always come in shocks and crises after a prolonged period of monotony. In my youth I sighed against monotony, and wanted romance; now I dread romance. Romance is romantic only for the hearers and onlookers, not for the actors. It is hard to enter its gates (happily); but to repass them is impossible. Once step aside from the ways of 'comfortable men,' you cannot regain them. You will live and die under the law of the intolerable thing they call romance. Though it may return on you in cycles and crises, you are ever dreading its next manifestation. Nor need you be 'romantic' to others; the most terrible romances are inward, and the intolerableness of them is that they pass in silence. ... One person told me that my own life was a beautiful romance. 'Beautiful' is not my standpoint. The sole beautiful romances are the Saints', which are essentially inward. But I never meant to write all this."

All this, and much unwritten trepidation, because he had to travel three-fourths of the railroad to Brighton! Of all places Sussex, he had said, was the place where he preferred to live; but the getting him there was as difficult as a journey to Siberia. And from Crawley he wrote:—

"I am a helpless waterlogged and dismasted vessel, drifting without power to guide my own course, and equally far from port whichever way I turn my eyes. I can only fling this bottle into the sea and leave you to discern my impotent and wrecked condition."

The "flung bottle" was stamped and caught the post!

In the following year (1907) it became evident that he was again in urgent need of change. He was thinner, even less punctual, more languorous when he fell into fits of abstraction; less precise when he would have assumed the pathetically alert step and speech by which he had been used to respond to introductions and the calls of the very unexacting establishment he still visited sometimes twice, sometimes thrice, and always once a week. He had grown listless and slow, and it was proposed he should go to the country. "Certainly, Wilfrid," he responded, coming the next evening to explain it was impossible; his boots, which looked stronger than himself, would not travel, he said; the coat covering his insufficient shoulders was insufficient. Boots and shirts were bought. It was arranged that we should call for him the next day at eleven. Accordingly my father and I and a friend presented ourselves in a motor at his dwelling, prepared to wait his dressing-time. But he was already out; nor could his landlady, who had not seen him abroad at such an hour in all her past experience, say why or where. When at last he came, he carried a paper bag with food purchased at a shop far distant. No gourmet could have been at greater pains to secure the particular pork-pie, and no other, that he wanted.

At first he and I had sleeping quarters in an independent pavilion among fern and young oaks, as guests of Wilfrid Blunt at his Newbuildings Place, near Southwater. Breakfast and a log-fire used to be prepared for us by David, a genius among odd-men, who came

through the dew before we were awake, and disturbed us with the fragrance of his toast and coffee. Francis would get up quite early, but at night he was late. I used to see him in his room, propped against pillows, with candles burning and his prayer-book in his hand far into the night; and his light would still be bright when the stars had begun to grow faint in the plantation of young oaks. Later, he was moved to David's cottage, whence he was fetched every day to Newbuildings Place, half a mile away, for luncheon and tea. David and Mrs. David had gained the unwilling confidence of the invalid, and Wilfrid Blunt, an adept in everything, himself saw that medical help was necessary. In September a doctor was consulted, but if no effective treatment followed it was probably because Francis's evasions successfully prevented a satisfactory diagnosis.

To the care he received in Sussex there was no end. His little tragedy at Newbuildings was a wasp-sting. Enmity had started some days before, when a wasp fell into his wine-glass. It got out and was staggering on the table when I came upon the scene. Francis stood still, watching with fire in his eye. "You *drunken* brute," he said with loud severity. But no wasp, drunken or respectable, would he kill, though he could be bitter. The next day he was stung, and Wilfrid Blunt held it of faith that for all that summer, after the poet's malediction, no wasps buzzed in Sussex. "Sir, to leave things out of a book merely because people tell you they will not be believed, is meanness," says Mr. Blunt in the words of Dr. Johnson. For all that (since a biographer's unbelief must count for something) I do not here record the lesser-miracles remem-

bered by his host. But the following (an earlier experience) is of Francis's own telling, in *Health and Holiness:*—

"In solitude a poet underwent profound sadness and suffered brief exultations of power: the wild miseries of a Berlioz gave place to accesses of half-pained delight. On a day when the skirts of a prolonged darkness were drawing off for him, he walked the garden, inhaling the keenly languorous relief of mental and bodily convalescence, the nerves sensitised by suffering. Passing in a reverie before an arum, he suddenly was aware of a minute white-stoled child sitting on the lily. For a second he viewed her with surprised delight, but no wonder; then returning to consciousness, he recognised the hallucination almost in the instant of her vanishing."

Father Gerrard, who met him in Sussex, afterwards wrote:—

"Only a few weeks ago, I was chatting with Francis Thompson in his cosy retreat at Southwater, whither he had gone as the guest of Mr. Wilfrid Blunt, to see if haply he might pull together his shattered frame. But the phthisis fiend had caught him in a tight grip. He was a dying man, and an old man, although only forty-eight years of age. Still, even in his extremity the characteristics of his life were manifest, a shrinking from fellowship, a keen perception and love of the Church, a ready and masterful power of language. I could not say that conversation with him was ever an easy thing, if by conversation one means unceasing talk. Besides talk there were thoughtful silences. Then, after the thought, came the outpouring of its rich expression. The doings of the outside world had little interest for him, but the messages which I had for him from his little circle of friends set him all aglow."

He returned weaker than he went. In his extremity of feebleness any hurt seemed grievous to him. Upon

an umbrella falling against him in the railway carriage, he turned to me with a tremulous: " I am the target of all disasters !" And when a busybody of a fellow-passenger asked him, on account of his notable thinness: " Do you suffer with your chest, sir ?" Thompson, who had but one lung, and that diseased, answered sharply, " No !" Even then he did not know the extent of his trouble. In error he attributed all his ills to one cause. My father, seeing him on his return, said to him, " Francis, you are ill." " Yes, Wilfrid," he answered, " I am more ill than you think "; and then spoke a word from which both had refrained for years. " I am dying from laudanum poisoning."

My father asked him if he were willing to go to the Hospital of St John and St Elizabeth. The fact that my sister—the Sylvia of *Sister Songs*—chanced at that moment to be lying ill there, led him to consider the institution without hostility, and the next day, my father having previously recommended him to the nuns, he went unreluctant to his death-bed. Consumption was the mortal disease, and he had grown grievously thin, and too weak to be allowed much less than his habitual doses of laudanum. Some little while before the hours at which these became due, the tax upon his remaining strength was very heavy; but only when in acutest need of the one medicine that could keep him alive (as, indeed, it had done over a long course of years) were the last days distressing for him. During most of them (he was in St John and St Elizabeth's ten days) he was content with his surroundings, and knew Sister Michael, his most kind nurse. His reading was divided between his prayer-book and W. W. Jacobs' *Many*

Cargoes, neither of which attested his realisation of the end. But he was not ignorant of it. When I last saw him he took my father's hand and kept it within his own, chafing and patting it as if to make a last farewell. He died at dawn on November 13, 1907.

But, for all that friends were at hand, the nurse tender, and the priest punctual, his passing was solitary. His bedside was not one at which watchers share commingling cold, as when a widow's burning fingers, holding those of her dead, are turned to inner ice; his going not as a child's, which chills the house. The fires quenched were his own. It seemed to his friends as if it were a matter personal to himself; while their sorrow for their own loss was mixed almost with satisfaction at something ended in his favour, as if at last he had had his way in a transaction with a Second Party, who might have long and painfully delayed the issue.

Nothing improvident or improper, it seemed to those at hand, had happened in the hospital ward. Such were one's feelings beside the tall window, among nuns who smiled happily because he had received the Sacraments. His features, when I went to make a drawing of him in the small mortuary that stood among the wintry garden-trees, were entirely peaceful, so that I, who had sometimes known them otherwise, fell into the mood of the cheerful lay-sister with the keys, who said: " I hear he had a very good death." To the priest, who had seen him in communion with the Church and her saints at the moment which may be accounted the most solitary possible to the heart of man, no thought of especial loneliness was associated with his death.

He was too magnanimous to take one to his dead heart. Suffering alone, he escaped alone, and left none strictly bound on his account. He left his friends to be busy, not with his ashes, but his works. It was as if the winds that caught and checked his breath were those that blew his fame into conspicuous glows. He was laid to rest in St Mary's Cemetery, Kensal Green. In his coffin were roses from Meredith's garden, inscribed with Meredith's testimony—" A true poet, one of the small band." And violets went to the dead poet's breast from the hand of her whose praises he had divinely sung. " Devoted friends lament him," wrote my father, " no less for himself than for his singing. But let none be named the benefactor of him who gave to all more than any could give to him. He made all men his debtors, leaving to those who loved him the memory of his personality, and to English poetry an imperishable name."

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